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EDITORIAL

World Environment Day • 5 June 1994 •
UNEP
United Nations Environment Programme
1994 UN International Year of the Family
ONE EARTH • ONE FAMILY

ELIZABETH DOWDESWELL
United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UNEP

The global village. The new world order. The peace dividend. These are all buzzwords of the 1990s that reflected an optimistic outlook for the dawning of the next century. Each idea brought a sense that finally we could progress from the dysfunction caused by failing to understand that we are one family.

Unfortunately, it has become obvious that the corner turned did not lead to a smooth road on which racism, nationalism and a plethora of insular, myopic attitudes were put behind us. In fact, it seems that we have entered a period where many of the demons of the Cold War era – whether economic, environmental or social – still loom like an ominous cloud on the horizon.

This foreboding has become all the more apparent by the numerous reports of the past year outlining the global security problems we face as a result of environmental and development woes. At the Earth Summit two years ago there was a lot of talk about doomsday if action was not taken. And, if anything, some of those scenarios seem all the more imminent.

We know the problems. And, in fact, we know some of the solutions. It is only a matter of the political will to implement them.

Politics aside, there is a more basic approach each individual can take. We must recognize our responsibilities to the planet. What this means is quite simple: we are one earth and one family. This concept is the theme of this year's World Environment Day.

The family is the backbone of any society and it should provide the necessary moral foundation that we build on. But families all over the world are under heavy stress. Disease, war, poverty, crime and drugs are tearing the fibres that bind families – and subsequently societies – together. So it is vital that all of us – no matter what age or gender – help make the family a refuge from these problems.

Working at the United Nations, it is much easier for thousands of our employees to appreciate the concept of the human family. That's because everyday we are in contact with people of all creeds, colour and religions. But what about the herder in Mongolia, the farmer in Africa, the fisherman in the South Pacific, the hunter in the Arctic, the civil servant in Europe or the financier on Wall Street? How do these people transcend what is in some cases an isolated existence or in others an all-encompassing occupation?

One way is to break things down to basics. Think about the water we drink, the energy we use and the food we eat. All are finite resources and the way we use one of them affects the life of someone in another part of our global village. In a very practical manner everyone from adolescents to octogenarians can take action. Reducing water and energy consumption or volunteering in community-based organizations are others.

With this special World Environment Day issue of ***Our Planet*** we have tried to provide a forum for political, religious and youth leaders to underline the importance of the One Earth, One Family theme. We hope their work and messages will motivate the world's citizens to make a contribution, however small, towards understanding World Environment Day and our purpose on this planet•

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One family or two?

RICHARD JOLLY

Deputy Executive Director Programmes, UNICEF

'There are only two families in the world', Miguel Cervantes' grandmother told him nearly 400 years ago, 'the Haves and the Have Nots'.

Now, largely thanks to the insights brought by the environmental movement, we know that, in reality, there is only one human family on Earth. But it remains a family divided: the split between rich and poor is wider than ever, and is the greatest of all barriers to human progress. And it is a family in which the young suffer most – and yet show the greatest energy and commitment to bringing change.

In this, the International Year of the Family (IYF), 35,000 young children are dying each day from the combined effects of poverty and environmental degradation – from hunger and from preventable disease, primarily caused by pollutants and pathogens in air, water, soils or food. By the end of the year, as in every year, nearly 13 million children will have perished. Every year, too, the lives of many millions more are severely impaired.

The poorest children

One-fifth of the world's children live in absolute poverty. Most of these poorest children live in rapidly deteriorating environments because their families are forced to cultivate the most marginal and vulnerable land, or have to migrate into the slums and shantytowns of exploding cities.

The World Food Council (WFC) has estimated that perhaps half a billion people are now living and farming on hillsides subject to serious erosion. Every year nearly 17 million more hectares of tropical forests are destroyed; every year some 6 million hectares of dry land turn to dust; every year, billions of tonnes of precious topsoil are washed and blown away from lands on which increasing numbers of families who have nowhere else to go must grow their food and earn their living.

Meanwhile global estimates suggest that some 100 million city children now spend most of their time on the streets, working as informal traders, beggars and – too often – as prostitutes and petty criminals. Thirty million of these actually live on the streets – an estimated five million of them cut off from all contact with their families.

All these children, their families and their communities, are the chief victims of a cruel conjunction of poverty, population pressure and environmental degradation. Poverty drives parents to have more children to help in the fields and their homes and to care for them in old age. Increasing population puts further pressure on the schools, the soil and water supplies, and swells migration to the slums. The resulting damage to the environment combines with the direct effects of population growth to make families even poorer – and the vicious spiral begins again.

In a child's early years – even in the womb – he or she is particularly vulnerable to pollution and other environmental insults, which have much greater and longer-lasting effects on their growing minds and bodies than on adults. As the child grows, so do its needs from the environment – for play, for education, for human interaction and for access to all the skills and support necessary for successful

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

adulthood. Again, it is the poorest children who are most vulnerable to pollution and whose environmental needs are least satisfied.

I have recently visited both Sarajevo and Somalia and the strongest image I carry in my mind is of the devastating effects of those brutal and destroyed environments on the young. The poverty-population growth-environmental degradation spiral both increases social divisions, political unrest, migration and war, and is accelerated by them.

In recent years the international community has committed a new priority to sustainable human development. The International Year of the Family provides a great opportunity to translate these new commitments into practical action for children and youth everywhere.

As the IYF reminds us, the family is society's most basic structure, the first building block of all human relationships and the fundamental unit of organization. It has unique advantages. It is a human institution, with human values and human goals, operating in environmental reality. In sociological jargon, it is the ultimate fully-integrated, multi-sectoral, grassroots institution for human development. In more direct language, the family is for most of us the locus of our deepest human experience. Intimacy and passion, identity and self-hood, connection to the past and hope for the future – all arise from this little nexus.

UNICEF believes that the family – and its immediate community – is the most logical action point for meeting the needs of children and youth, for fully developing their energies and talents, and for implementing international, national and local policies to achieve sustainable human development.

Kenji Aoki/UNEP Select

Empowering the Have Nots

We must empower the Have Not majority of the human family to meet their basic needs while protecting and making the best use of their natural resources. The most obvious place to achieve this is the individual family; after all, people live in families, not in policies.

The needs of children and youth are implicit in the very definition of sustainable development: 'meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The Brundtland commission, which formulated this concept, noted that it had found, in its investigations and hearings, that 'it was the young, who have the most to lose, who were the harshest critics of the planet's present management'.

Children – who represent 20% of today, but 100% of tomorrow – clearly have the greatest stake in global management: their futures depend upon it. They are not merely passive victims of environmental degradation and failed development. They can be vital protagonists for real progress, particularly within their own families and communities. They are outspoken visionaries, a challenge to adults on environmental priorities. Their energies and talents are an enormous, largely unexploited, human resource.

As James Grant, UNICEF's Executive Director, told the 1992 Earth Summit, 'Children and youth are often the environmental conscience of their families and communities. If their enthusiasm and energy are engaged by solid environmental action at home and ▶

Jørgen Schytte/Still Pictures

at school, they will start "saving the earth" in their daily lives and grow into environmentally and socially responsible citizens."

Dr Jane Goodall – the renowned primatologist whose research with chimpanzees gave us a new definition of ourselves, by showing how our near relatives grow up in families with acute sensitivity to each other and the environment – has started a programme for young schoolchildren in 20 countries. Called 'Roots and Shoots', it aims to encourage their environmental sensibilities by developing concern for plants, animals and for each other.

Think locally

She believes – and this is highly relevant to our policy discussions in the Year of the Family – that we can only grow to think globally by first thinking locally. For her, the dictum for sustainable development policies must be 'think locally, think globally, act locally'.

This is what we have been trying to do in UNICEF, particularly in immunizing children against the great killer diseases of polio, measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus. In 1980 only about 20% of one-year-old children in developing countries were covered. At the then rate of progress, cover would have increased to between 50 and 55% by 1990. In fact a worldwide campaign by UNICEF and the World Health Organization achieved 80% immunization in developing countries – a higher level than exists in the United Kingdom, and much higher than in the United States – by that date.

More important, the incidence of measles, diphtheria and tetanus has fallen, with barely 100,000 children being crippled from polio each year worldwide today compared with 500,000 in the early 1980s. Indeed the goal of eradicating polio from the face of this Earth by the year 2000 can now be seen as a realistic objective. There has been no case of polio in either American continent for almost three years, and none in southern Africa for over a year and a half.

This has been achieved through a way of working which can be relevant for all parts of the United Nations system and with respect to all aspects of sustainable human development. From practical experience, it can make the United Nations more effective operationally. There are essentially five elements in this new paradigm of action:

- **A frame of commitments and principles under which national and international action should proceed.**
- **Specific goals with international and national programmes of action for their implementation.**
- **Low-cost approaches with re-prioritization of national and international resources to make action affordable.**
- **A process of mobilization of many groups, government and non-government, academic and commercial, international, national, and as appropriate at different local levels.**
- **A system of monitoring and accountability, to ensure that action is kept under close watch, with remedial action when progress stalls.**

These elements made all the difference to the immunization efforts. The ambitious goal of universal immunization by the year 1990 had been set by WHO in 1977. UNICEF and WHO offices in each country met with national officials of the Ministry of Health, and pressed for specific action within that country to achieve the goal. UNICEF's flexibility and outreach were used to encourage and support a process of mobilization which, in most countries, went far beyond Ministries of Health and heavily involved schoolchildren and the press. Internationally, Rotary Clubs pledged in the mid-1980s to raise US$100 million towards the goal of polio eradication by the year 2005; in fact they raised nearly two and a half times as much 15 years before the deadline – $240 million by 1990. I could go on to mention the role of the churches, other international groups, commercial companies and other agencies of the United Nations system, as well as bilateral support, but the process can be imagined. Certainly, the results were spectacular.

This model now needs to be applied to the whole range of human development actions: to human development focused on the eradication of poverty; to environmental protection and sustainable development; to new approaches to peace-making and to conflict resolution; to the strengthening of human rights and democratic processes; to measures of increased support for the least developed countries; and to more effective management of global economic and financial relationships.

We are already part of the way towards the goal on sustainable human development. In the last few years there have been major advances in policies which give real priority to this area. Goals have been set and national programmes have been launched.

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Child-related goals

The 1990 World Summit for Children set 27 child-related global goals for the year 2000 to be achieved through integrated, multi-sectoral actions involving all sectors of societies and supported by increased political commitments. More than 150 countries have endorsed these goals and more than 90 have already launched national programmes of action for children.

The 1991 Earth Summit endorsed these goals and went further, emphasizing that human beings are at the centre of concerns for human development and recognized that women, children and youth are particularly vulnerable groups needing special support.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 and has already been ratified by at least 155 countries. It may soon be the first universally ratified United Nations convention.

These policy instruments are now the foundation of all UNICEF assistance and action. The value of the goals for children is that they provide a monitorable checklist of 'do-able', priority actions. The power of the Convention is that it supports the new commitments to children with legally enforceable rights and responsibilities.

The right, and most cost-effective, starting points to help millions of people escape from the poverty-population-environment spiral are low-cost opportunities to protect the health, nutrition and education of children and women in the developing countries. Meeting these basic needs must be integrated with two other essential elements; empowerment and the environment. People and communities must be given space, opportunity and access to resources and services; and the environment must be used in sustainable ways, so that the whole community benefits in the long run.

UNICEF brings these three elements together in the concept of primary environmental care to ensure that environmental factors are reflected in all its programmes and to secure sustainable livelihoods at family and community levels. Environmental education and empowerment are also major themes of UNICEF's global advocacy for children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized in its opening paragraph 'the inherent dignity.... and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.' But I cannot read these words without remembering a recent discussion with a group of European teenagers. They were fervent in their awareness of environmental and development problems, and full of insights about them. But, when asked how they envisaged their own lifestyles in 30 years time, they could not imagine doing without expensive new cars and arrays of household equipment.

Global strategy needed

The gap between the richest and poorest peoples in the world today – between Miguel Cervantes' grandmother's 'two families' – is in the order of 150 to one and widening. And it is the lifestyles of the rich that are the most unsustainable. We need a global strategy to cope with both excessive affluence and widespread poverty, because without greater equity and respect for human rights there can be no real sustainable development. Our children, our youth and our families depend on our producing it●

I'm only a CHILD but...

SEVERN SUZUKI

I'm only a child, but I'm very worried – because I hear about the thinning ozone layer, global warming, forests disappearing and the oceans being polluted. I can't control these things but they will hurt my life.

In all cultures, throughout history, parents and leaders have made sacrifices for their children, the future heirs, the inheritors of the world. Yet today, children are seen as politically unimportant, since they can't vote, and are forgotten when decisions are being made. But they will inherit, nevertheless, the full effect of those decisions; children will make sacrifices in the future for their parents' comfort today. Politicians make choices at our expense to get elected. Where are their consciences?

I was able to speak at one of the plenary sessions at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. My group, the Environmental Children's Organization (ECO), spent a long time raising funds so that we could attend. We wanted to try to act as a conscience for grown-ups, to make sure they remembered those with no political voice. We were surprised to realize, when we got there, how much such reminders were needed. We learned that it was easy for such big conferences to lose track of the real issues and end up spending too much time on small details.

We were shocked to find that so few children were involved in the official Earth

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Summit that people were very surprised to see us there: only one delegation – the Dutch – brought children as official delegates.

Children are now very aware of the problems facing their future: it's hard to remain oblivious because of all the information conveyed to us by the media. All these problems seem overwhelming, and a lot of kids feel helpless.

A child's point of view

It is very hard for children to get their views out. Adults seem to keep in mind only ideas and benefits for the short term, forgetting the long-term significance of their everyday actions, of the weight they have on the lives of children not yet born, children of the future.

I believe we must change our values and actions. Perhaps, as a child, my life and ideas are pretty simple and straightforward, but I wonder sometimes if adults, in their complicated work and lives, forget what's really important.

Is the secret for adults to find real values, to remember all the insects and birds of their own childhood, to remember catching butterflies and looking for frogs in ponds? To remember playing in the grass and climbing trees? To remember how important these things were, how the world would be unimaginable without them? And to remember how they trusted grown-ups to make sure everything would be all right?

I think adults know, in their hearts, what values, what principles are right.

But once people become adults, do they forget what made them happy, thinking only of 'being realistic', of stocks and bonds, political compromises and making money?

Perhaps one of the most important things for children to do is to realize and learn from the mistakes made by our parents; we must try not to repeat them.

If we in the industrialized world have developed down a hopeless path – 'consume it all until there is nothing left to consume' – the developing world hasn't yet done so. I hope they learn from our mistakes.

When I was in Rio, a social worker introduced me and my friends to a group of street children. It was quite an experience: we had never met children who were considered lucky to live 10 to a one-room hovel, the toilets a mere jagged hole in the concrete floor. We couldn't begin to imagine living in their situation.

One told us, 'I wish I was rich. And if I were, I would give all the street children food, clothes, medicine, love and affection.' If a child in the street who has nothing is willing to share, how can we who have everything be so greedy?

So who am I to make recommendations to children of the developing South when it is my way of life that has forced their countries into the international debt which strips away their resource capital and their futures? The only thing I have a right to say is that I don't intend to grow up embracing that all-consuming passion which shrinks the planet's future; and that I can only hope that those few in the South who have a choice have already come to the same conclusion.

Child power

I don't need all the things we buy for brief enjoyment, then forget or throw away. I'm willing to send my allowance to children who could do so much more with it. I can help others in my own country who wake up every morning hoping for a meal. And I can influence my parents and grandparents.

This is the International Year of the Family, and the answer lies in the family because parents love their children. It is that love which will be the power and the motivation to change. It's true that children have no direct political power: but we have power over those who do. And we'd better use it as if our lives depended on it●

Who talks to my mother?

An interview with GERTRUDE MONGELLA

M. Tzovaras/UN

Gertrude Mongella is Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women

When Gertrude Mongella was 15, growing up on the island of Ukerewe in the south of Lake Victoria, she overheard an uncle scold her father for sending her and her sisters to school. 'Why waste your money to educate the women. They will be useless.'

'I heard my father's reply with my two ears,' she says, sitting back in her chair in her enormous office in a New York skyscraper. ' " I have got four children," he said, "three girls and a boy, and to me they are equal. I am going to educate every one of them up to the best of their ability and all of them will be free to do what they want to do." '

What Mrs Mongella – who rose to the Tanzanian cabinet – now wants to do is to help her father's philosophy, extremely rare in her teens, triumph over her uncle's, which remains prevalent even now she is to be Secretary General of next year's Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing.

Women lose out

Even today, as she points out, two-thirds of the world's one billion illiterates are women. Two-thirds of the children in developing countries who either never start school or drop out early are girls. And this is only the beginning. Women also lose out in nutrition and health care – Amartya Sen, the Harvard economist, estimates that there are some 100 million women 'missing' from the developing world, women who have died early because of such discrimination.

The consequences of inequity may be harshest in the poorest countries, but Gertrude Mongella says that it is merely a matter of degree. 'No country is developed for women,' she says. The Human Development Report for The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) confirms that women receive less education and income than men in both rich and poor countries. In every country UNDP has studied it has also found some form of legal discrimination against women.

'Women's unequal status starts in the family,' she says. 'It is here that men and women learn the norms of life. The family remains a place where much of the gender-based violence and discrimination occurs that so seriously impedes women's rights and freedoms. It is within the family that the unequal treatment of boys and girls with regard to access to education, to health services, and to opportunities to making life choices, is being perpetrated.'

An artificial world

Mrs Mongella herself lives in both rich and poor worlds. For most of her time she is based on the twelfth storey of a great glass skyscraper opposite the United Nations headquarters; but every year she goes back to her island in Lake Victoria, fetching water and firewood, cooking and tilling the fields.

'I am a rural woman in an artificial setting,' she says. 'My mother cannot believe that I live so high in the sky. This is the unreal world, here in New York, it is the real world that I go back to in Ukerewe Island.

'When development experts talk about women having to carry water, that is something that I experience. When people talk about women being weak, I think of my mother. She is 72 years old and still works more than 16 hours a day. She brought me up and made me live. How can I describe her as weak? She is strong: she is a hero.'

Yet when she last returned she found, to her sadness that 'I am losing the art of identifying different plants. The women knew all the plants by name, before they were recognized by the botanists. Since they were girls they have gone into the forests – our dispensaries – to look for herbs to heal people.'

On her island, as elsewhere in the rural Third World, it is the women who know and safeguard the genetic resources that scientists are so anxious to catalogue and protect; studies have shown that tribal

women in India know how to use some 300 forest plants as medicines.

They also use the forests for firewood, and are forced to walk further to gather fuel, when the forests are felled; the average amount of time Sudanese women have to spend collecting wood has quadrupled over the last 20 years. Traditionally they aim to conserve the forests, taking branches and dead wood rather than cutting down the trees. And all over the world women have been at the forefront of grassroots campaigns to save, and plant, forests.

Women produce 80% of the food grown in Africa and India. They do most of the hard labour in the fields, and together with their other duties, work half as many hours again as men each day. They earn less than men, but more of what they do earn goes to feed their children. Yet their work is rarely recognized, still less encouraged or supported.

'Most of the development experts never talk to the women,' says Mrs Mongella. 'They talk to the people of authority in the villages – the men – who just go "blah-blah". Who talks to my mother?

'Women remain the pillars and sustainers of the economic systems of many developing countries – so there is no way that sustainable development can be achieved without placing them in the mainstream of economic planning.'

The benefits of recognition

Women's economic contribution must be recognized, she says. They must be able to own land and have access to credit – both largely denied to them. There needs to be more emphasis on women's education, and more teaching of equality to both boys and girls. And they need more power to make decisions, in the family, in the community, in government – and in the United Nations.

Giving a proper priority to women would increase food production (since they are the farmers), safeguard the environment (because they are its main champions), benefit families (as they devote more of their income to children) and slow population growth (since improving the welfare of women is the most effective birth control).

'The secret of women is that the status quo does not have much to offer us. So when we decide to fight for our rights and the environment, we have nothing to lose.'

Gertrude Mongella hopes that next year's conference will mark a step away from discussing 'women's issues' in isolation – and therefore marginalizing them – to recognizing that nothing can be achieved unless women's potential is realized• **GL**

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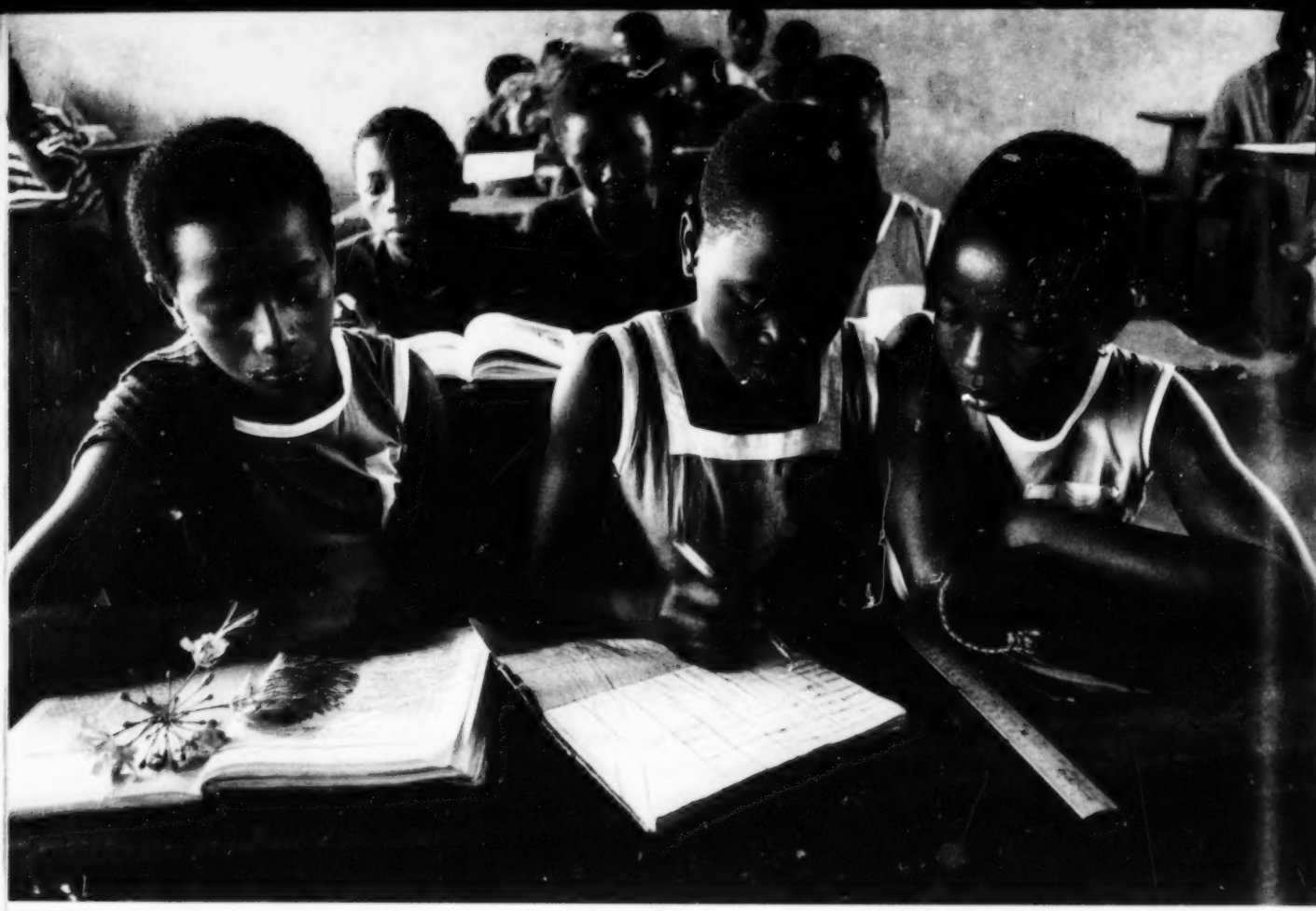

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Too much GREEN PROPAGANDA

IVAN HATTINGH

Development Director WWF UK; Chairman, Television Trust for the Environment

Nestling among the sand dunes of the northern coast of Holland lurks a man-made dune, a structure of great architectural ingenuity which was nearing completion when I visited the site last year.

A complex system of columns supported a concrete skin, to be covered in dune-soil and planted with scrub. The inside was rather like the interior of a giant Bedouin tent, pierced with glazed areas letting in winter sunlight. Dioramas and constructions were being built to simulate the trees and grass outside – a baffling attempt to create in artifice what existed in reality only a concrete skin away.

This environmental education and visitor's centre, costing millions of dollars, is just one in a long line of structures that have gone up around the world in the name of environmental education.

I have sat in darkened classrooms in the Grand Paradiso in Italy and in the Glacier National Park in the Rockies of Montana, watching as mountains parted like the Red Sea for Moses, at the press of a button, revealing their cross sectional structure – a mighty expensive and not very exciting interactive miracle.

Sadly, at a thousand less-resourced centres around the world, much of the same 'shallow-think' environmental education is being foisted on grateful southern countries. Some years ago, in Nakuru National park in Kenya, I watched in amazement as thirty children from Nairobi sat in a classroom intently doing brass rubbings of Africa's splendid wildlife – while outside a golden sun was setting across the lake, flamingos and pelicans in their thousands gossiped

noisily after the day's work, and herds of gazelle grazed within 100 metres of the centre.

Much of environmental education is neither environmental nor education. At best it can be described as 'Green propaganda'. This is probably because much of it is promoted by NGOs, organized by scientists or field biologists, and centred on their interest in plants and animals and in habitat protection.

A brief look at the history of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) illustrates the ceaseless attraction for the field conservation project over the far less romantic, but certainly more promising, notion of working within countries' existing educational structures.

Protection through education

In the WWF 1962 Deed of Incorporation, the drafting of which is attributed to the late Sir Julian Huxley, the stated aims of the new charity were to ensure the protection of the soil, water and air of the planet. Education was to be the method for achieving this, together with the funding of limited exemplary field projects which would act (for the educational programme) as examples of good practice.

But the attractions of the African plains, teeming at the time with large and well-loved mammals, and the excitement of bouncing Landrovers over the meerkat holes while avoiding termites' high rise homes, proved irresistible.

Before long the whole operation had been hijacked by the 'dart the rhino in the bum' brigade, and it took the World Conservation Strategy – an immensely important document prepared jointly by WWF, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1980 – to shift the organization back on course.

But by then millions of hard earned pounds had been spent to protect these animals, while white hunters (who had spent the previous 20 years pursuing and shooting leopard, lion, cheetah, giraffe, zebra, buffalo, rhinoceros and elephant) were happily harnessed into the new game.

The animals were to be fenced in (for their own good) and those left unprotected were to be studied for PhDs and counted and recounted to detect how their numbers had fallen. More importantly, they were to be used to attract tourists to boost the economies of states starved of hard currency. Most important of all, poachers were to be hunted down, arrested and sent to jail.

The removal of rights

The task of environmental education, in this scheme of things, was to persuade local people that, despite their fears, the removal of their rights to hunt animals for their survival was in their own interest, and that the disappearance of their traditional grazing land behind fences was in the interests of their newly independent states.

For country folk, the instrument of persuasion was the audio-visual van, loaded with cameras, generators, projectors and tape-slide presentations with such titles as 'Animals of the Ngorongoro Crater'. Meanwhile the field education centre was provided for the urban dweller; young people from the teeming cities were transported to these, 30 at a time, most ▶

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

weekends of the year (at great cost) to learn about the wonders of nature.

This approach paid the scantest regard to the wishes of the local people, and no thinking person would consider it to be either rational or sensible. Many people involved in environmental education will protest that there are now many examples of good practice. But old enthusiasms die hard.

Consider these two projects in plans for environmental education in Brazil in 1994 from a major environmental charity – which highlight one of the inherent problems of environmental education.

Project B0866
Concept Title:
Building Brazilian Capacity to Implement Environmental Education
Budget: $5,000

Project BR0015
Concept Title:
Environmental Education for Golden Lion Tamarin Conservation Programme
Budget: $70,000

Compare the grand ambitions, patronizing tone and ludicrously inadequate budget of the first project – with the narrow ambitions and relatively generous allocation of funds of the second.

There are still far too few good educationalists involved in environmental education, and far too little credit is given to the formal education systems in most countries.

The truth is that the most effective environmental education has been carried out by governments of the developing countries; they have not always focused on environmental education in the planning, but their achievements have frequently been considerable.

Recent experience shows that increasing literacy – particularly among women – is the most effective way of slowing population growth, and one of the most important ways of improving living conditions. There are encouraging indications that a number of African countries are at a critical turning point. Total fertility rates have already fallen in Botswana (6.9 in 1965 to 4.7 in 1990), Zimbabwe (8.0 in 1965 to 4.9 in 1990), and Kenya (8.0 in 1965 to 6.5 in 1990), and are beginning to decline in Ghana, Sudan and Togo.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has shown the fallacy of the widely held belief that the entire developing world is suffering acute hunger and that their food production is reaching its limits. 'There has been a general global improvement in food production and calorie supplies', it says. 'The daily calorie supply in the developing world improved from 90% of daily requirements in 1965 to 107% in 1985.'

'The most effective environmental education has been carried out by governments of the developing countries...'

Education has matched these steady improvements. Over 80% of children of the relevant age are enrolled in primary schools in developing countries. And in the newly industrialized countries of Southeast Asia some 90% of pupils of the appropriate age are enrolled in secondary schools.

These are not grounds for smug satisfaction, for much remains to be done to achieve a just, sustainable world, where education, health and work are available to all. But if non-governmental organizations and aid agencies continue to believe that environmental education is important, they should focus their attention on those institutions that have the responsibility to deliver education. If they insist on funding activities on the margins of education they will be marginalized: many initiatives already have been.

Tradition and convention

Peter Martin, the principal education officer of World Wide Fund for Nature (UK), in 'Education, the Environment and Sustainable Development' points out that we are all tied to ways of living by traditions and social conventions that have evolved over centuries – and which are promoted by our families, schooling, faiths, the books we read and the stories we are told as children, our cultural activities, newspapers, radio, television, the arts and entertainment. These are the things that educate us throughout our lives, make us the people we are and determine the way we view and use the environment. So all these sectors of the educational process need to take on responsibility for improving the quality of decision making about the use of resources and our interaction with the environment.

This is important not just for the environment, but for education. One of its prime functions is to prepare people for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences they will face through their lives and some of the most important responsibilities relate to the way they interact with the environment. If education

'Everyone needs – and has a right to – an environmental component to all the education they receive.'

is to fulfil its complete social role, it must prepare people as environmental decision makers.

Many people spend their whole lives directly managing and using the environment, seeking out, collecting or catching food, gathering fuel, collecting water, and building their homes from what they find about them. They receive, usually informally, an education that prepares them for their own local land management roles. But it is no longer sufficient.

It is less easy for people who work in offices, factories or the home to perceive their impact on the environment even though it influences their health and sense of well-being. They find it difficult to link the exhaust fumes from their cars to a rise in sea level caused by global warming; difficult to link the loss of species diversity in subtropical grasslands to the food they buy in the supermarket; difficult to link the water they use to the decline of lowland wetlands or the inundation of upland valleys. Their education often has little or no relevance to their environmental roles and responsibilities.

It is hard for individuals in a complex society to make a direct impact on decisions about the environment that are made by people in government and industry who they do not know and who have access to information, authority and spheres of influence to which they cannot gain access.

So everyone needs – and has a right to – an environmental component to all the education they receive. Everyone is entitled to experiences which will enable them to understand, analyse and respond to the environmental problems they meet and which encourages committed participation through understanding.

There have been some extremely effective initiatives over the past few years. The University of Strathclyde, for example, has established a six-month course in curriculum development, concentrating on injecting environmental considerations into all subjects taught in schools. Taking 15 students a term (always a mixed group recruited from government and university curriculum development departments from many parts of the world) it has been fully subscribed for three years, and its graduates are beginning to have a real influence on what is being taught in many countries of the world.

Reaching out

The Outreach Programme, part sponsored by UNEP and directed by Professor James Connor of New York University, has enabled (on a small budget) the production of large quantities of educational comic books for use in primary schools. These are produced in the country in which they are to be used and have so far been distributed in bulk in 37 countries around the world. Meanwhile WWF (UK) has brought together a new consortium of agencies to establish a consultancy on environmental education. It is active in Nigeria, United Republic of Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Poland, Argentina and Brazil, and works largely with these countries' formal institutions.

For the past nine years the small and dynamic Television Trust for the Environment (TVE), directed by Robert Lamb and based in London, has had an important and growing impact on broadcasting. The quality of its films is recognized around the world and they have, over the years, received all the major international awards. All of their films are distributed in appropriate languages. In 1993 alone, some 20,000 cassettes were distributed and broadcast in developing countries. Increasingly, they are being directed by film makers from the developing world.

The 1992 Earth Summit resolved, in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21: 'Both formal and non-formal education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they have the capacity to assess and address their sustainable development concerns. It is also critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making'.

These, not nature education or green propaganda, are the true tasks of environmental education•

Shout Photographic

GrassrootS

DONATUS DA SILVA

HOMELESS IN LONDON

Helen's ordeal began three years ago when she fled her violent partner, taking her 12-year-old daughter and infant son, and found a place at a women's refuge. Her family is one of the 150,000 families in London living in temporary accommodation, waiting for the local council to find suitable housing.

While the women's refuge offered Helen and her children security from the abuse they experienced at home, the accommodation was far from suitable to her needs. Helen's living space consisted of one small room, and the refuge was located miles from her daughter Michelle's school.

This brought problems of its own. Michelle is dyslexic and so needs specialist teaching. She was attending a special school where she felt confident and supported. When Helen moved to the refuge, Michelle began to be increasingly distressed, and Helen's young son also developed severe behavioural problems. The local council made offers of accommodation, but all have been unsuitable.

Helen is now receiving support from Barnado's Families in Temporary Accommodation project. The project is aimed at helping some of the families living in temporary accommodation, including refuges and bed and breakfast (B&B) hotels, in London.

Life in B&B accommodation for the homeless is far from ideal. The majority of families have to share toilets and bathrooms and have no system for rubbish disposal. Lack of privacy and cramped conditions stretch relationships to the limit. Families often break up and the incidence of abuse and neglect is higher than average.

On top of this, health care and education pose other problems. School places are hard to come by and children of homeless families are forced to change school regularly, seriously disrupting their education. Registering with a family doctor is difficult. Some families give false details to gain access to health care. Emergency admissions to hospital are two and a half times greater than average for families living in temporary accommodation.

KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

The Barnado's project, launched in February 1994, helps parents living in temporary accommodation to put their lives back together. It aims to work with 200 children and families each week, providing places for children to play and finding schools for them. The project will also conduct counselling sessions, offer advice on permanent housing and applying for government benefit payments, give information on health matters, and provide special equipment to prevent accidents.

Roger Singleton, Barnado's senior director, and himself a parent who was homeless in London for three years, says: 'We will be working with those families hardest hit; families living in the worst standard of temporary accommodation, women escaping domestic violence, refugees, very young families and those with serious illness or disability. We will work in five south London boroughs with a fifth of the capital's homeless families, giving people the support they need to cope with an impossible situation'•

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

GrassrootS

DONATUS DA SILVA

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Neil Cooper/Panos Pictures

On a green patch of land in the heart of Lahore stands a brightly-coloured double-decker bus – the first children's lending library in Pakistan and the first project of Alif Laila, an NGO dedicated to improving education among disadvantaged communities in Pakistan.

Medhat and Basarat Kazim, directors of Alif Laila, were originally cautioned against setting up the book bus – parents would not send their children; the response among children themselves would be poor; books would not be returned. But experience proved otherwise. The library has a membership of more than 1,000 children and books are always returned on time.

Following on from this success, Alif Laila managed to persuade the Punjab government to build a permanent reference library next to the book bus. This supplements the bus collection with reference books, magazines, games and puzzles. It also houses photocopying facilities, a television and a video recorder, used to show educational films. Both libraries hold books on environmental subjects in a number of languages, including English and Punjabi, and a volunteer teacher from Alif Laila is always present, sometimes holding discussions about problems that affect the children and their community.

Basarat and Medhat Kazim are concerned about the standard of education among the disadvantaged communities of developing countries. 'State schools have poor facilities, and education is largely irrelevant to the practical needs of the community. Many children drop out,' says Basarat Kazim.

HANDS-ON METHODS

Four years ago, Alif Laila set up Hobby Clubs, offering a range of classes in practical subjects. The children respond quickly to hands-on teaching methods: they design and build models, learn wordprocessing and computer graphics, discover their ability to draw and paint, and learn about recycling.

The Hobby Clubs centre also uses drama and puppetry to communicate the importance of education, caring for the environment and health and sanitation. These messages often travel beyond the centre when the pupils perform plays for their communities.

With six state schools sending about 2,000 children to the Hobby Clubs, it is not surprising that they are now considered a major education resource centre.

Alif Laila's latest venture is the opening of schools in slum areas, the first in a Bihari community in Lahore. For the first six months, attendance was disappointingly low. Parents on the whole could not afford to forgo a child's wage by sending him or her to school instead of to work. Some parents even came to the school demanding to be paid 200 rupees (US$6) for sending their children, but were refused. Despite this, numbers eventually began to grow – mothers, in particular, beginning to grasp the importance of education.

Word about the community school quickly spread. The Pathans living next to the Bihari community asked Alif Laila to set up a school for their boys and girls – a surprising request since the Pathans had been known to object strongly to education for women.

The community schools have done a great deal to change the lives and outlook of children in the most depressed areas of Lahore. Basarat says, 'The children studying there are bright and intelligent. They are quick to learn...after their encounter with education, the children do not want to go back to their old ways.'

The syllabuses and teaching aids used have now been documented. Based on their experience Alif Laila have evolved a 90-day functional literacy programme which requires only one hour of study per day. The organization is keen to share its experiences with other NGOs, and intends to continue its work by setting up libraries, hobby clubs and community schools in other parts of Pakistan•

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Changing consumerism

MARIA ELENA HURTADO

Global Policy and Campaigns Director
International Organization of
Consumers Unions

'If everyone does as he pleases in the short run,we are all losers in the long run.'

Gro Harlem Brundtland

If we want to bequeath future generations the life chances we ourselves enjoy, doing as we please may no longer be an option. With less than a quarter of the world's population, industrial countries consume four-fifths of its natural resources and generate around three-quarters of all the waste produced every year. So it is with good reason that the drive to enlist consumers in moving towards a 'sustainable society' is stronger there.

So far, this campaign has been led by environment groups and consumer organizations. Industrial countries refused to enter into any firm commitments to promote sustainable consumption at the 1992 Earth Summit. Since then, only the Dutch government has started to look into the matter seriously.

Inter-generational equity

'The concept of inter-generational equity, which is so central to the thinking of Rio, is a hallmark of the International Year of the Family,' says Henry Sokalski, United Nations coordinator for the year.

Individuals organized in families, or households, unwittingly contribute to the depletion of natural resources and pollution. In the South their impact is related to poverty – for example, through collecting firewood or farming on fragile soils. In the North it arises from consumption and waste; in the former West Germany, for example, private households use 45% of all the nation's energy.

But the family is also a place where positive attitudes towards the environment are developed. As psychologist Monica Lieschke, managing director of the Austrian Forum of Environmental Education, says it is 'where we first become acquainted with the world around us... As a result, first values and standards are acquired either towards a "hostile" environment or towards a friendly, rich and diverse one, which we may either approach respectfully, or just consume and waste.'

Studies show that care for the environment is strongly determined by the quality and the frequency of a child's early contacts with nature. Consumption patterns are rooted in habits and cultural traditions, many of them shaped during childhood. The Japanese taste for whale meat or the American predilection for beef are but cases in point.

In the four decades to 1990, global consumption exceeded the level reached by all past generations since Man first appeared. Over 80% of it took place in developed countries.

If the entire world used wood as much as the Dutch, 11 billion cubic metres of timber per year would be needed by 2010 – and there would not be enough forests in the world to supply it.

Environmental and economic values

Until the advent of 'green consumerism', personal preference, quality, durability, performance and 'value for money' determined what goods people bought. 'The consumer family of the affluent societies has profited from market prices far below the real cost of production,' says Heiko Steffens, lecturer at the Technical University of Berlin and an expert on questions of household consumption. 'Fortunately, more and more families, including my own, recognize that there is now a trade-off between economic and environmental values. We recognize that this costs money because market prices have to include the cost of a sound environment and the cost we owe to the people of the Third World.'

At two recent international meetings linking environmental protection and the United Nations Year of the Family, Steffens insisted that consumer organizations should promote the principle of 'Abstain to Sustain' by educating consumers not only to opt for 'green' products but to ask themselves whether they really need particular goods or services at all.

Consumer organizations, set up originally to point developed country consumers towards the best and safest buy, and to protect them against abuses, are slowly introducing the environmental dimension into their work.

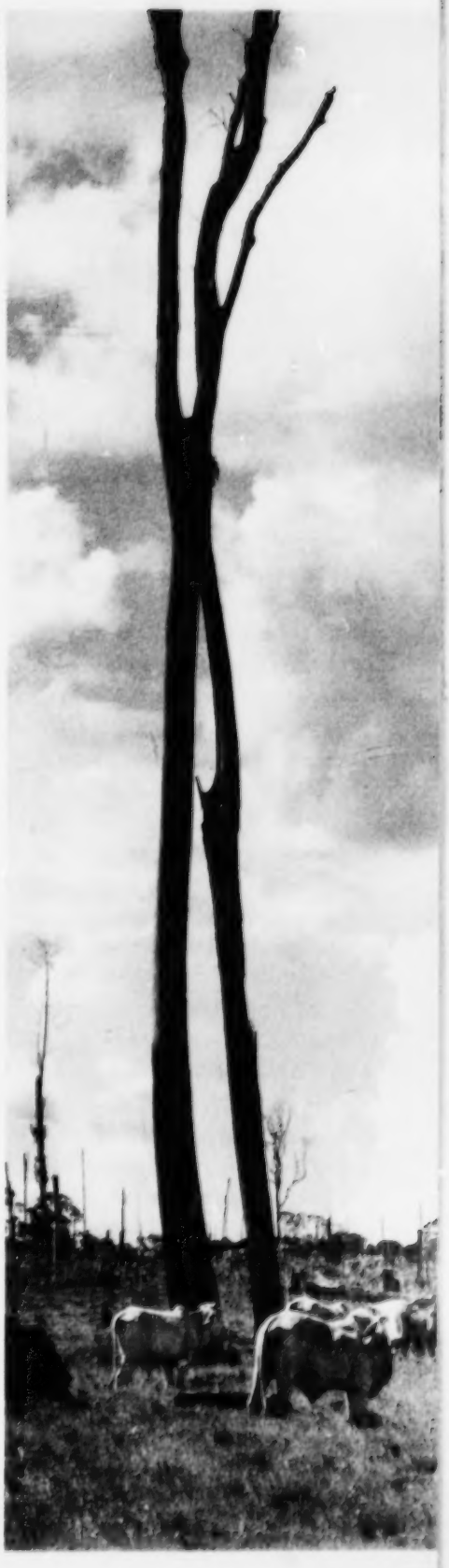
Some, for example, are starting to test the environmental impact of products and including the resulting ratings in their magazines. The Dutch consumer organization, Consumentenbond, evaluates the environmental soundness of products for accurate labelling, energy and water use, emissions, noise and odour, radiation, packaging, composition and harmful standards. It remains pioneering work: the costs are high and the methods have still to be refined. So-called 'cradle to grave' environmental impact analyses of products, which are also becoming part of comparative environmental testing of products and services, are even more difficult.

Some consumer organizations check the accuracy of 'green' labels on products. Stiftung Warentest, the German consumer organization, runs a 'green page' in its magazine to highlight latest developments and runs pictures of the 'trick packaging' and 'waste packaging' of the month.

Rhetoric is not enough

Through these and other efforts, information is filtering through. In a 1992 poll of European community consumers, 80% said they were trying hard to buy green products and 50% said that they were willing to pay more for them. But there is a large gap between environmental rhetoric and action: in the United States, far more consumers say they want to buy 'green' products than actually do so.

A series of studies by the Institute for Consumer Research in The Hague (SWOKA), also showed that even those who declare their concern for the environment may not choose 'green' products, such as organically-grown vegetables, if they are more expensive and difficult to find. 'The consumer can be a pioneer of sustainable ▶



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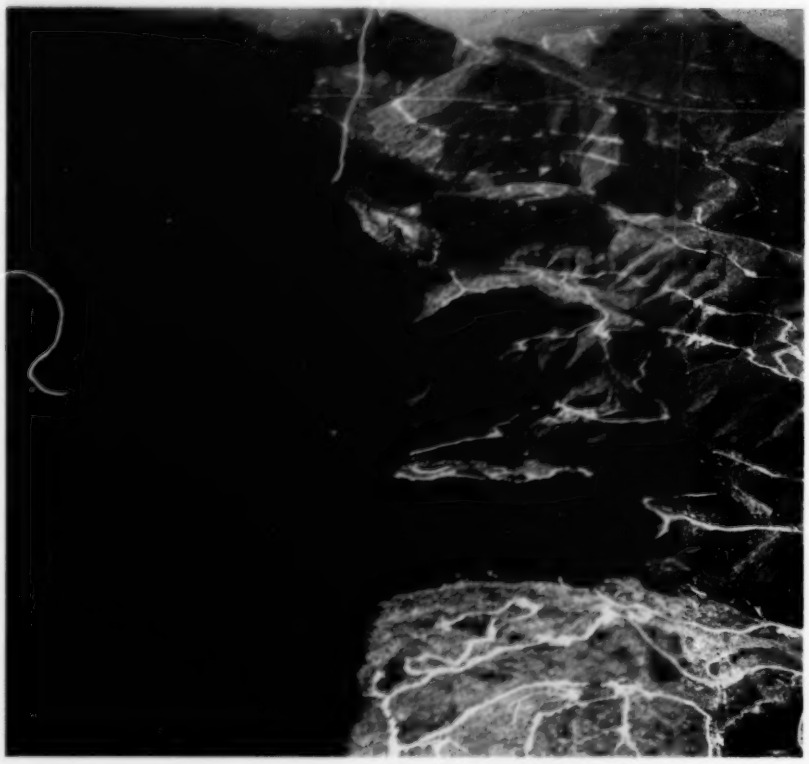

Daniel Dancer/Still Pictures

consumption, if he is supported in the process by it being *impossible* to buy products that are harmful to the environment', the study concludes.

SWOKA adds that 'applying the market mechanism will not bring the sustainable society any nearer.' Hence, 'apart from consumers and producers, the government will have to play a regulatory and fostering role.'

Good information about the most important environmental problems and how individuals can help solve them is critical in changing consumer behaviour. A 'Green Quiz' of subscribers to the magazine of the Consumers Union of the United States showed, for example, that consumers overestimated the importance of recycling and the danger posed by plastics. On the other hand, they greatly underestimated the environmental impact of beef ranching and the danger of naturally occurring radon gas.

Modifying lifestyles

'Green consumerism' has yet to show that it can make a measurable difference. As the International Organization of Consumers Unions points out in *Beyond 2000: Transition to Sustainable Consumption*, 'while many "green" consumers shop religiously for phosphate-free cleaning products and for toilet paper made from recycled paper, they are not ready to get rid of their second car, move into a smaller, non air-conditioned home, eat a lot less meat, or make other lifestyle changes that would significantly reduce their environmental impact.'

The trick, the Dutch Government has concluded, is to modify the lifestyles of affluent citizens in industrial countries without demanding undue sacrifices. A study commissioned by the Dutch Government came up with some innovative solutions.

One was to rationalize access to goods and services, and reduce traffic congestion, by such measures as encouraging bulk deliveries to people's homes and fostering working from home.

The second was to increase communal services. The more people who live alone, or in nuclear families, the more domestic appliances, furnishings, cars, etc. there will be. Providing enough places to eat out near home would reduce the demand for fuel for transport; services such as laundries would cut down on the number of domestic washing machines.

The third was to extend the useful life of products and setting up repair and exchange services. The last proposal was to promote the purchase of services not products, for example, by commuting by public transport, rather than buying a car, or employing a decorating firm rather than buying do-it-yourself equipment.

The long-term goal would be to get people to put all their actions through a 'green quality filter', just as today they base decisions on financial, health, social and legal considerations. Or as the United States-based Worldwatch Institute put it, 'When most people see a large automobile and think first of the air pollution it causes, rather than the social status it conveys, environmental ethics will have arrived' ●

ONE EARTH, ONE FAMILY

THE RT HON JOHN GUMMER MP

Secretary of State for the Environment (UK)

To achieve sustainable development we will need to change our lifestyle. It is not possible to deal with the enormous questions which the already foreseeable future demands without accepting that we are going to have to look at how we all live in a very fundamental way. And in doing so we are going to have to face some unpleasant truths about ourselves.

For far too long mankind has treated the world as if we were its conquerors. We have thought of the environment as something to be tamed, to be overcome, to be mastered. This shows in the way we talk of eradicating disease or destroying pests or weeds; or of harnessing rivers, clearing jungle or reclaiming marshes. Triumphalism was the theme; we saw ourselves as masters, if not of the universe, then at least the planet.

Sustainable development requires that we have a very different relationship with the rest of creation. We are one family, and we share this our only home. There are growing signs that it is not in good repair. These signs were forcefully documented earlier this year in UNEP's *Environmental Data Report 1993-94*. Rising sea levels and retreating glaciers are among the many signs that the global warming anticipated by the scientists may be beginning. There is a real possibility that the worldwide collapse in amphibian populations may be a consequence of the human induced depletion of the ozone layer. All over the world, reliable supplies of fresh water, sea fish and fertile soil are in sharp decline, and we continue to lose tropical forests with their priceless genetic endowment at an alarming rate.

Meanwhile, the number of people in the human family continues to grow. There are five and a half billion of us now, and our numbers are growing by about a billion a decade. To put this into perspective, it took the whole of human history up until 1850 to reach the first billion. Growth of this magnitude will generate enormous momentum for change. The overriding task for the family of man is to ensure that this change is towards sustainable development.

One of the clearest of all messages from Rio was that delivering sustainable development is not a task for governments alone. But far too often, the sustainable option – to use public transport, to recycle waste, to switch off the light or turn down the air-conditioner – is something we want someone else to do so that we can go on with our old wasteful and unsustainable habits. This will no longer do. Nor will it do to comfort a guilty conscience with the excuse that no individual action can make a worthwhile contribution to solving such vast problems.

The evidence of history clearly suggests that people change willingly and rapidly when they are pursuing opportunities and very reluctantly and slowly under threats. If we are to persuade the human family to adopt sustainable development we have to avoid the hair-shirt approach. Voluntary puritanism is not a prescription for change.

To fulfil our responsibility to our children to ensure that they have the same chance to enjoy their lives as we have had, we must change our lifestyles and so transform our economies. But we will only succeed in doing so if we can present the challenge of sustainable development to people as an opportunity to be taken, not a threat to be avoided•

IN PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Vice President of the United States, AL GORE

Two years ago in Rio the great riches of human creativity were on full display. Scientists displayed startlingly beautiful computer images of every square inch of the Earth – as seen from space. Artists crafted spectacular sculptures, paintings, music, graphics and films. And they all seemed more alike than different: the indigenous person and the artist, the scientist and the child, the tourist and the diplomat. All seemed to share a deeper understanding – a recognition that we are all part of something much larger than ourselves, a family related only distantly by blood but intimately by commitment to each other's common future.

And so it is today. We are from different parts of the globe. But we are united by a common premise: that human activities are needlessly causing grave and perhaps irreparable damage to the global environment. And the dangers are clear to all of us.

Degradation of land, forests and fresh water – individually and synergistically – play critical roles in international instability. Huge quantities of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases dumped in the atmosphere trap heat, and raise global temperatures. Harvard Professor Edward Wilson, writing in the *New York Times*, summarized the notions of those who have a different view.

'Population growth? Good for the economy – so let it run. Land shortages? Try fusion energy to power the desalting of sea water, then reclaim the world's deserts ... by towing icebergs to coastal pipelines...

'Species going extinct? Not to worry,' the skeptics say. 'That is nature's way. Think of humankind as only the latest in a long line of exterminating agents in geological time. Resources? The planet has more than enough resources to last indefinitely.'

Wilson called this group the 'exemptionalists' because they hold that humans are so transcendent in intelligence and spirit that they have been exempted 'from the iron laws of ecology that bind all other species.'

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

HUMAN RACE NOT EXEMPT

The human race is not exempt. The laws of ecology bind us, too. We made a commitment at Rio to change our course. We made a commitment to reject the counsel of those who would continue along the road to extermination.

But of course, what we have done so far is only a beginning. We cannot overestimate the difficulties that lie ahead. In fact, from the vast array of problems about which it is possible to be pessimistic, let me mention two.

First, population growth. It is sobering to realize what is happening to the world's population in the course of our lifetimes. From the beginning of the human species until the end of World War II, when I was born, it took more than 10,000 generations to reach a world population of a little more than 2 billion. But in just the past 45 years, it has gone from a little over 2 billion to 5.5 billion. And if I live another 45 years, it will be 9 or 10 billion.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

The changes brought about by this explosion are not for the distant future. This is not only a problem for our grandchildren. The problems are already here. Soil erosion. The loss of vegetative cover. Extinction. Desertification. Famine. The garbage crisis.

The population explosion, accompanied by wholesale changes in technology, affects every aspect of our lives, in every part of the globe.

Now, sometimes, developing countries feel the population argument is one made by wealthy countries who want to clamp down on their ability to grow.

Sometimes the developing countries are right. So I say this to citizens of the developed nations: we have a disproportionate impact on the global environment. We have less than a quarter of the world's population – but we use three quarters of the world's raw materials and create three quarters of all solid waste. One way to put it is this: a child born in the United States will have 30 times more impact on the Earth's environment during his or her lifetime than a child born in India.

The affluent of the world have a responsibility to deal with their disproportionate impact. But population growth affects everyone. By the year 2000, 31 low-income countries will be unable to feed their people using their own land.

Is population growth only a problem of birth control? Of course not. Paradoxically reducing infant mortality is important as well. Several decades ago, Julius Nyerere put this matter cogently: 'The most powerful contraceptive is the confidence of parents that their children will survive.'

Slowing population growth is in the deepest self-interest of all governments. It is a responsibility for rich and poor countries alike.

Rapid population growth is only one of the causes of a profound transformation in the relationship between human civilization and the ecological system of the Earth. The emergence of extremely powerful new technologies that magnify the impact each of us can have on the global environment has also played an important role.

A VULNERABLE PLANET

Most significant of all, many people now think about our relationship to the Earth in ways that assume we don't have to concern ourselves with the consequences of our actions – as if the global environment will forever be impervious to the rapidly mounting insults to its integrity and balance. But the evidence of deterioration is all around us.

Take, for example, the threat to our supply of fresh water.

There is a lot of water on Earth. But there isn't very much fresh water – only about 2.5% of all water on Earth is fresh and most of that is locked away as ice in Antarctica or Greenland, or other areas.

Furthermore, much of that water is used inefficiently. It may also be polluted by toxics and human waste. Meanwhile, by the year 2000, 18 of the 22 largest metropolitan areas in the world – those with more than 10 million people – will be in developing countries. By 2025, 60% of the world's population will live in cities – that's more than 5 billion people. They will urgently need fresh water and water sanitation.

Even though our worldwide civilization confronts an unprecedented global environmental crisis, we go from day to day without confronting the rapid change now under way. We must recognize the extent to which we are damaging the global environment, and we must develop new ways to work together to foster economic progress without environmental destruction.

How do we do it? Two principles must guide us as we set about the pursuit of sustainable development.

First, the principle of national responsibility. Will the United States show that sense of commitment? We can and we will.

But just as each nation must assume national responsibility, so must we all act together. If sustainable development is to become a reality, the second principle we must follow is that of partnership.

There are still those who think the wealthy countries on this planet have a monopoly on technology and insight. That's nonsense. We can all learn from each other. Over the last 20 years we have made some progress in creating the basis for a global partnership. UNCED was a landmark in unifying 'environment' and 'development' in the term 'sustainable development'. Now this insight must be given life within the policies of every government. Trade, commerce, agriculture... all interests need to be part of the effort●

Adapted from a speech made before the first session of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development.

F·O·C·U·S

EDITED BY JOE KIRWIN

RIO
TWO YEARS ON

'Will this summit merely be a high point in our expressions of good intentions and enthusiasm and excitement, or will it be the start of a process of a fundamental change which we absolutely need?
...Let's be realistic... the road from Rio is going to be more difficult than the road to Rio.'

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

United Nations Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED) Secretary-General Maurice Strong uttered those words two years ago at a press conference on a Sunday morning on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. It was obvious the Canadian diplomat did not let the heady cocktail of exhaustion and euphoria cloud his judgement. Like an explorer who had spent two years trying to plot the course to an Atlantis-like world of sustainable development, Strong was confident the route had been charted. But the pitfalls and other perils of the journey ahead were all too clear.

Two years on and, as usual, Strong's foresight proved to be more accurate than he could imagine. In an interview with *Our Planet* he was the first to admit it.

'The momentum of Rio has been lost at the government level and the fundamental changes needed to head off impending disaster are no closer to reality than they were two years ago – in fact things have gone backwards if anything,' says Strong, who now heads the Costa-Rica-based Earth Council, which has been set up to monitor Rio's follow-up, and is Chairman of Ontario Hydro in Canada. 'In the South there has been some increase in living standards in some places such as Asia and parts of South America but it is with the same old unsustainable ways.'

As Strong and others would admit, there has been some progress in areas of policy. Climate change, nuclear waste dumping at sea and biological diversity are but three important ones. It is now obvious that Rio marked a Rubicon of sorts when it comes to coupling environment and development as well as involving non-governmental organizations.

A SHIFT IN ATTITUDE

Another spot in an otherwise cloudy future is a shift in attitude on the part of two of the world's crucial players: the United States and China. Both Washington, due to the Clinton-Gore administration, and Beijing, with their new comprehensive national Agenda 21 plan, seem much more receptive to the concept of sustainable development. However, it remains to be seen how these new attitudes translate into action.

Then there are those crucial issues – such as finance, including the restructuring of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and technology transfer – that seem to underpin to the whole sustainable development process, and that are far from being resolved. Ditto for the issue of consumption and of lifestyle patterns, which are crucial factors in the lopsided ratio that marks the difference between life in the North and the South. Indeed the recession in the world economy in the past two years has proved just how difficult squaring that equation has been and will be.

COUNTING THE COST

In fact, the deepening world recession added a major – and somewhat unexpected – roadblock months after heads of states and delegates left Brazil and returned home with grand plans for achieving sustainable development. In addition the cost of placing peace-keepers in various international hotspots such as Bosnia and Somalia has left the till empty when it comes to new funding for financing what the UNCED Secretariat estimated would be a US$125 billion per annum price tag for implementing the 40 chapters of Agenda 21.

'Instead it is basically a sum zero game when it comes to new money,' said Cliff Curtis, an international policy advisor with Greenpeace. 'There was approximately $4 to $5 billion pledged in Rio in new funds and very little if any of that has materialized.' Nowadays many international financial experts who have worked closely with the financial issue concede that the crucial question is no longer 'new' money.

'The question now is making use of existing money in the most efficient way,' says Hussein Abaza, chief economist and head of UNEP's Economics and Environment division. 'This is especially true when it comes to making the best possible use of money spent by various United Nations agencies as well as bilateral and multilateral development institutions. It is also equally true when it comes to the policy reforms required to be introduced to ensure the sustainability of implemented activities and programmes.'

As Abaza is quick to point out, the financial crunch that has plagued implementation of sustainable development in the South is, if anything, worse today than it was two years ago.

'In many cases today, the economies of the South are being strangled on the one hand by World Bank and IMF reforms which have not proved to have passed the sustainability criteria; debt burden and unfair international economic relations,' Abaza explained. 'On the other hand there are unfair terms of trade, including the use of policy instruments such as subsidies, that have distorted commodity prices and the competitiveness of developing countries in the international market.'

'Let's face it, the funding for subsequent sustainable development will not be resolved until there is a level playing field in the global marketplace,' Abaza added. 'Capacity-building in the developing world is a great idea and very fashionable but two things have to happen: subsidies must be removed – and the GATT negotiations last year proved how difficult that will be. Also environmental and social costs of products should be internalized to reflect their real costs and to make sure the full value of the commodity is borne by the consumer and producer.'

ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS PINPOINTED

At recent workshops and at the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) intersessional meetings on the finance issue, economic ▶

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instruments – especially in the form of 'green taxes' – in both developed and developing nations, have been pinpointed as a likely way to raise needed funds for sustainable development. The latest green tax proposed would slap a levy on airlines.

'The possibility of reforming national taxation systems to shift the bulk of the tax burden from labour, capital and income towards the use of natural resources should be considered,' stated a policy paper distributed at a recent CSD meeting.

Technology transfer and the concomitant intellectual property rights issue have proved to be only slightly less difficult. Workshops held in Norway and another held in Colombia jointly sponsored with the United States provided numerous options. These included clearing-houses, referral services, exchange programmes, 'one-stop shops', build-operate-transfer schemes and technology rights banks.

But first more research and development is needed when it comes to pinpointing environmentally sound technologies.

'This is where clean technology and life cycle analyses come into play,' says Nay Htun, who was Deputy Executive Director of UNEP and a former member of the UNCED secretariat. 'There is a lot of work in this field now but there still is a long way to go.'

One quick solution, according to Abaza, would be providing appropriate technology in place of aid money. 'So much aid comes in the form of technology, which worked in the donor nation but collapse in the developing world after a year or two,' Abaza said. 'That has happened for various reasons. Either it was the wrong technology to begin with or it wasn't properly supported with necessary training and maintenance services. It's like a heart or a lung transplant. It can easily be rejected.

'An example where an existing technology could be transferred in the form of aid to Africa is solar energy,' Abaza said. 'In Africa the potential is vast because the conditions are right. But how many solar panels do you see? Not too many.'

Many governments and NGOs from the developed world cite political corruption as a barrier to a breakthrough on not only technology transfer but other economic and environment reforms. But others, such as Abaza, counter those arguments.

'Sure there is corruption but it works both ways', he says. 'It is just as corrupt for developed nations to give aid and say it must be spent on A, B or C – all of which will benefit companies from the donor nation.'

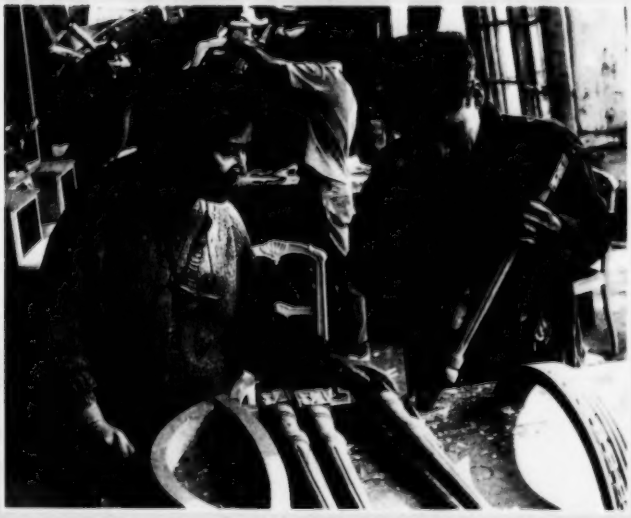
THE TREATY RATIFIED

21 December 1993 marked an historic day in the aftermath of Rio. On that day the 50th ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was received at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and allowed the treaty to go into effect in March 1994. But the problems of implementation have become all too clear.

There was a general agreement at an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) meeting held in February this year that there is a need for further reduction of greenhouse gases than that already called for in the treaty.

'The meeting in February basically answered the question of whether the treaty needs to be strengthened,' said Scott Hajost, an international attorney with the American-based Environmental Defence Fund. 'Now the debate begins of how and when.'

As preparations for next year's first convening of the parties continues, political battles in Western capitals have proved how difficult this will be.



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In Europe, where nations pushed for cutbacks to greenhouse gases in the pre-Rio days, the treaty has yet to be ratified due to disagreements between northern and southern European nations on burden-sharing. Also a proposed European Union (EU) carbon tax has fallen by the wayside after the British Government dug in its heels and rebuffed an otherwise unanimous European Union Council of Ministers. Despite that failure, Danish Environment Minister Sven Auken, whose Government has led the fight for a EU carbon tax, says the battle over the carbon tax is not finished. 'It has to happen,' says Auken. 'It is just a matter of time.'

Across the Atlantic Ocean, the subject of an energy tax has proved just as difficult. Despite a proposal by United States President Bill Clinton for a so-called BTU tax, which the administration decided on in order to distribute the burden of energy reduction on all sources, as opposed to only fossil fuel, was rejected by the United States Congress. Politicians and lobbyists from American oil-producing states such as Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas played a major role in the bill's defeat.

In Rio and afterwards more than 165 nations signed the Convention for Biological Diversity. The treaty went into force on 29 December 1993 after the required 30 ratifications were received by the United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali.

DIVISION AMONG THE PARTIES

As with the Climate Change Convention, an October meeting of the INC – in preparation for the first meeting of the parties to be held in December – outlined numerous issues that have divided the parties. A few of these revolve around a possible protocol on biotechnology to regulate genetically modified organisms. Again, technology transfer, intellectual property rights and funding are nettlesome questions that are as much unanswered as they were several years ago.

An issue interrelated to both climate change and biological diversity concerns forestry. The squabbling between tropical timber producing and temperate timber producing nations prevented a Rio convention on forestry and hampered negotiations over the Forestry Principles and has continued. That became obvious during last year's negotiations at the International Tropical Timber Organization. In that accord a compromise was reached by which developed nations (that is, temperate timber producing nations) agreed to commit to sustainable forestry practices by the year 2000. The deal was struck after tropical timber producing nations argued in vain that the agreement should cover all forests, North and South.

'It really comes down to developed nations living up to the same standards they demand of the South,' said Bai-Mass Max Taal, a forestry expert with UNEP's Terrestrial Ecosystems Branch. 'Clearcutting and protection of virgin forests is just as important as saving the rainforest. There still is a lack of political will on these issues as well as finance shortages.'

At the third UNCED prepcom – held in Geneva – an evening session on desertification was scheduled. Few showed up other than a number of African delegates. Most were at a reception being held in the foyer of the Palais des Nations. Feeling snubbed, the African nations banded together and eventually put forth demands for a Desertification Convention. The final negotiating stage for the convention will take place in Paris in June.

Whatever comes of the final treaty – and certainly new money is not likely – it has become obvious that the scope and seriousness of the problem of desertification is still not understood. Western media has been rife with reports about the 'myth of desertification'. Unlike ozone depletion or climate change, which are concepts now rooted in public perception, most assume desertification is an African problem involving nations on the fringe of the Sahara Desert. 'This is despite the fact that it is a worldwide land ▶

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

degradation problem with more than 900 million people at risk,' says Franklin Cardy, who heads UNEP's Desertification Unit.

A STUNNING SUCCESS

Most international experts, who have followed the UNCED process and the post-Rio progress, agree there is one stunning success that has emerged from Rio. This is NGO participation in the process.

'I can remember back at the first prepcom when there was tremendous argument about NGO participation,' says Htun. 'Now it is taken for granted and most governments realize how much NGOs can contribute to the issues.'

Despite getting their foot in the UNCED and now the CSD door, many NGOs admit they too have had a difficult time making a post-Rio transition.

'Now that the international community is calling for practical case studies of substance on such issues as sustainable agriculture, management of toxic wastes, changing consumption patterns, and human habitats, the same NGOs who worked with the UNCED process are not necessarily the ones to deliver the goods,' said Mike McCoy, with the United States Citizens Network. 'They know how to deliver the goods but the ones who know the substance of how to actually achieve sustainability are grassroots groups, the social movement activists and alternative researchers and technical folk at the local and national level.'

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GRASSROOTS GROUPS

Strong could not agree more: 'If there is one encouraging sign since Rio, it is the way grassroots groups at the local level around the world have taken the Rio spirit and adopted their own Agenda 21 plans,' says Strong. 'I just hope that enthusiasm and concern eventually work their way up the system and push governments into the action that is so desperately needed.'

Much of the task of monitoring and cajoling governments into action falls into the court of the CSD. While most academics, NGOs and others refrain from grading the work of the CSD to date, most agree that the 1994 session will go a long way in determining just how effective it will be.

'Will governments, via the CSD, be able to take off their national hats and work for the common good of the planet?' asks Curtis. 'That is what it really all comes down to'• JK

RIO...TWO YEARS ON DEBATE

BO KJELLÉN

Ambassador
Chief Negotiator
Ministry of the Environment
and Natural Resources
Sweden

'The Rio process... has shown its strength. Action is being taken on a broad scale and at many different levels.'

As tired and worn-out delegates drove back from Riocentro just before midnight on June 13, 1992 – and I was among the last, having negotiated Chapter 9 of Agenda 21, on Atmosphere, up to the absolute deadline – they shared mixed feelings of accomplishment and concern. The accomplishment was obvious: we had managed to negotiate Agenda 21, The Rio Declaration and the Forest Principles in less than two years. That had required a spirit of compromise and hard work, supported by the inspiring chairmanship of Tommy Koh of Singapore and the never flagging drive and optimism of Secretary-General Maurice Strong. In addition, the NGO community had constantly pushed the negotiations forward.

No, this was not a small achievement; and added to it was the satisfaction of seeing more than 100 heads of state and government around one table at the largest ever Earth Summit, and of knowing that more than 150 countries had already signed the conventions on Biodiversity and on Climate Change.

But the concern was also there. Would the efforts finally be worthwhile? Was there a risk that this conference would be just another of those media events that would finally sink into oblivion, forgotten by everybody except the professional negotiators? We had all said that Rio was part of a process and that its real impact could only be judged in the light of the follow-up. But would the process even get off the ground?

Two years have passed. Can we feel reassured today? Many people might answer no. They see no major changes in governments' actions, no sensational breakthroughs in achieving greener policies. They see environmental concerns being squeezed in a period of budget austerity and an overriding priority for creating jobs, particularly in Europe. They see no real movement towards new and additional resources for development.

But despite all this, I don't agree. In my view – and I think that those who have been involved in the Rio process from the beginning in 1989/90 up till now would share this opinion – the process has shown its strength. Action is being taken on a broad scale and at many different levels. Let me give some examples.

- **If I may judge from the experience of Sweden, Agenda 21 is a living reality at the local level. Chapter 28 with its call for local agendas before 1996 is constantly referred to in meetings and policy documents in large and small municipalities. Overall planning, traffic systems, waste management – all these are revised in the light of Agenda 21. I have no reason to believe that we are unique: all over the world municipalities are probably doing the same.**

- **The corporate sector is meeting the new challenge of Rio in a constructive way. As *The Financial Times* put it after the Conference: 'Companies will have to realize that Government policies are turning more green, that there will be more economic instruments used to promote environmentally sound production; and that local and national action will be increasingly used to meet global concerns.' And business and industry is responding to the challenge; new products, new production processes and new greener, marketing strategies are appearing. Once again, Agenda 21 is being implemented.**

- **The Earth Summit raised the level of what is considered politically possible and feasible in many countries. Many governments have crafted new legislation and new economic instruments in terms of the requirements of Agenda 21, and ▶**

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'Change has to be gradual – and I feel that the turn has begun, slowly, painfully, hesitantly – but a turn it is, nevertheless.'

of the Rio Declaration. The Precautionary Principle and the Polluter Pays Principle appear both in official texts and in opposition criticism. With clear reference to Rio, the Swedish Government has launched an Ecocycle Bill, aimed at moving society from a 'linear' to a 'cyclic' approach, a step on the road to a truly sustainable model of society.

• Certainly, we must not confound action at the somewhat theoretical and distant United Nations level with real action in the real world. It is probably too early to tell whether the new Commission for Sustainable Development will be an instrument to reckon with in the follow-up to Rio. However, the first session, in June 1993, showed that Ministers were ready to come and that they were ready to discuss difficult political issues with an open mind. If this approach is confirmed in May this year, the CSD might well be a powerful tool to carry the flame from Rio.

• But the multilateral effort is not only by the United Nations itself. Let us not forget that the two conventions signed in Rio have already entered into force, the requisite number of ratifications being obtained (Biodiversity, December 1993, Climate, March 1994). The negotiations for a convention to combat desertification on the basis of Agenda 21, Chapter 12 are in a final phase, demonstrating a common will to find new approaches to the drylands problems. Thee is also more and more interest in ensuring that the Forest Principles should be implemented in practice. And everywhere in the United Nations system action is being initiated against the background of Rio: UNEP is a case in point with the new priorities adopted by the Governing Council in May 1993.

• It is true that the record on the financial side is meagre. Aid budgets are being squeezed, Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 remaining to be implemented. But also here there is some movement, at least in thinking and reflecting. New ideas for mobilizing resources through innovative methods might well appear as a result of ongoing discussions.

• An essential feature of this is also the Rio effect to break down sector barriers; we realize now that problems of global environment and development have to be tackled in a horizontal, interdisciplinary way. Therefore, the four major United Nations conferences over the next few years (Population in Cairo later this year, the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen and the Conference on Women in Beijing, both in 1995, and Habitat II, in Turkey in 1996) are also part of the Rio follow-up and will be given more strength by this added dimension.

I certainly do not want to paint too rosy a picture. Progress is uneven. The general uncertainty and pessimism that characterizes the present world situation makes it difficult to envisage the long term, and the very long term – concepts that are essential for achieving the necessary changes in lifestyles, consumption patterns, and economic policies if our societies are to be truly sustainable. But we are talking of immense systems: change has to be gradual – and I feel that the turn has begun, slowly, painfully, hesitantly – but a turn it is, nevertheless.

However, nothing can be achieved by governments alone, by NGOs alone, by individuals alone, by international organizations alone, by science alone, by business alone, by the South alone or by the North alone. Do we yet fully appreciate the new needs for cooperation in the post-Rio era? • **BK**

BRAZILLE MUSUMBA

Communications Officer
Kenya Energy and Environment Organization

"UNCED opened a space for NGOs and provided an enviroment for increased influence on national, regional and international environment and development policies."

Non-government organizations (NGOs) are by their nature very close to the people and their problems. Over time, they have developed a better understanding of the problems and opportunities that exist for solving them. The United Nations Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED) opened a space for NGOs and provided an environment for increased influence on national, regional and international environment and development policies. Before UNCED, few Kenyan NGOs appreciated policy issues as they relate to development and environment activities. This scenario changed a great deal during the period that led up to UNCED primarily because northern NGOs, already involved in policy advocacy, applied pressure. In order to gain the credence needed, they sought alliances and partnerships with southern NGOs to gain a broader, fairer international representation and perspective.

This pressure prompted many southern NGOs to broaden their vision of environment and development issues. One notable result was that we could put forth views that countered those put forth by bureaucrats, whether they were from the North or South. At the same time UNCED underlined the need for southern NGOs to fine-tune their skills in order to realize the changes for which they lobbied.

Many governments continue to demand the service of NGOs. A good illustration of government-NGO collaboration has emerged here in Kenya. Kenya Energy and Environment Organization (KENGO) has, for example, been invited to participate in the National Environment Action Plan (NEAP) being prepared by the Kenyan Government. KENGO has also been requested by the Government to play a key role in the preparation of the Kenya Forestry Master Plan and in the development of a policy paper on environment and development.

Another positive trend that emerged during and immediately after the Rio Conference was the increased information flow to southern NGOs on global issues. This provided the NGOs with access to vital information crucial for successful lobbying and/or advocating for or against environment and development issues affecting their local constituencies. Many of these issues were previously off-limits to us.

But the increased visibility and influence of NGOs in the South has caused political and capacity problems. In Kenya, the enforcement of the much challenged NGO Coordinaton Act of 1990 was a clear indication of the government's intention to 'rein-in' NGOs in the country, even though they were recognized as 'partners in development'.

As a result of the UNCED process, many NGOs that have limited capacities now face intense demands for information and services. Kenya is one of those countries in Africa that has numerous NGOs. Yet, among all the NGOs that exist, only three have the capacity to simultaneously address environment and development at both the national and international level. For example, an organization like KENGO finds itself spread thin trying to meet all requests by international institutions and government departments to participate in planning and evaluation sessions. The institutions that require such input from KENGO rarely stop to ask what kind of resources NGOs might need to participate in their activities. Indeed, even an institution such as UNEP, which is notorious for making such requests, has no mechanism for supporting NGO resources, on which it continually draws.

For these reasons, the progress achieved with UNCED is now being compromised. In response to these institutional changes, KENGO has redesigned its approach to community development and environmental conservation. This redesigning has entailed a new functional structure designed to make KENGO more responsive and better able to serve grassroots needs.

This has been done by developing an eco-cultural approach to development by catalysing local communities so they can gain confidence and control over their own development. This strategy also provides a mechanism by which grassroots groups can deliberate on the major environment and development issues that affect them.

At the same time these mechanisms serve as channels for the flow of information among themselves, the government and other institutions• **BM** ▶

MIKE McCOY

Citizen's Network
USA

'Now the sobering reality... of implementing that ambitious vision of two years ago squarely faces all the principal Earth Summit actors, and unfortunately they are all coming up short.'

The raised hopes represented by the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1994 were, at the time, an incredible inspiration to the entire world. People everywhere believed governments, North and South, the political and bureaucratic leadership of the international community, would respond positively and boldly to the future economic and ecological challenges.

Today the media circus that was Rio is a distant memory and the excitement surrounding governments and the United Nations system as it developed the grand vision of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 has faded. Now the sobering and very complicated reality of implementing that ambitious vision of two years ago squarely faces all the principal Earth Summit actors, and unfortunately they are all coming up short.

Why the failure of political will on the part of heads of state and governments all over the world, but especially in the North? Why the lack of creative cast studies of 'genuine sustainable economic and ecological alternatives' that were supposed to flood into the United Nations system and to national governments from all sectors of a newly energized civil society? Why the obvious lack of interest by national and international media in the 'challenges of sustainability?'

Why has the new Secretariat of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) not been properly staffed? And why has the newly created United Nations Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD) not been given adequate visionary direction?

The reasons are not surprising. In fact many cynics could have predicted all the following failures before the final texts were negotiated in Brazil. But it is a powerful desire in human nature to want to believe in the possibility of real change in 'business as usual', and – in the face of difficult odds – to hope for the best.

With the Earth Summit, elected officials and government bureaucrats in each national capital were responding to the tremendous interest by their citizens in seeing to it that governments and the United Nations system developed a coordinated international response to the rapid deterioration of their physical environment. This concern was heightened by events and trends in the 1980s such as the Bophal and Chernobyl disasters, ozone depletion and global warming as well as alarming health problems generated by toxic waste sites.

At the same time, many governments of the South, the economically poor everywhere, and critics of the present dominant economic development models, were looking to the Earth Summit to outline new 'sustainable' ways to assure economic security for more of the world's population.

AN EARLY DISAPPOINTMENT

The first disappointment became obvious early on when northern governments were unwilling to provide even a portion of the kinds of financial resources that they had promised at Rio. The second was when the greenest governments of the European Union – the Netherlands and Germany – began to back away from the strict targets they had set for themselves in reducing their CO_2 emissions by the year 2020. For example, Germany, which had intended to reduce its emissions 20% by the year 2020, is now hoping to hold steady or reduce its total by a mere 5%.

The Netherlands, which had hoped to reach a similar target, is now expecting to increase its emissions by 10% from 1985 levels before the year 2005. At the Earth Summit the Dutch government had confidentially announced that an additional 0.01% of total Dutch GNP would be targeted for the Agenda 21 implementation. This would be on top of its existing 0.7% of GNP committed to overseas development aid. However, Dutch NGOs report that the government is raiding the domestic

Ministry of Environment for a small percentage of this commitment.

LACK OF POLITICAL WILL

All kind of excuses have been made by northern governments in the corridors of the United Nations as to why they have backed down from earlier commitments. These include the 'lack of a clear international programme related to Agenda 21 to fund' or the 'prolonged recession in the North' or the 'changing domestic priorities'. But to most observers, it only represents a massive lack of political will on the part of the richest governments of the world.

Why can't the Clinton administration expend a little of its political capital with the American public by taking seriously its responsibility for sustainability both domestically and internationally? For example, the United States government – as Sarah Burns of the World Resources Institute wryly noted – needs to recognize that 'dealing with the Agenda 21 issue of northern sustainable consumption and production patterns means a lot more than just increased energy efficiency'.

What will make governments from the North and South take sustainable development seriously? Will it take an environmental disaster – another Bophal or Chernobyl – to get the attention of political leaders? Governments do not accept the challenge today because to implement sustainability at a national level will involve difficult institutional changes. Moreover it will include changing present structures of taxation as well as subsidies to encourage sustainable development.

And as some documents prepared for the Preparatory Committee for the forthcoming United Nations Summit on Social Development have recently acknowledged, what is required for global sustainability is not merely 'poverty alleviation' but actually 'poverty elimination'. The timid political leadership that exists in most countries in the 1990s does not seem likely to meet such a challenge. There simply needs to be bolder leadership.

PROBLEMS FOR THE FUTURE

There was great optimism with the establishment of the CSD. It was to be the mechanism that reviewed and summarized national reports, and annually digested the work of national and international experts as they slogged through all 40 chapters of Agenda 21. There are two problems in its first year of operation that could spell trouble for the future. First, the existing staff of eight professionals is too small to complete the complex and exacting responsibilities of the secretariat for the CSD. For example, there are only two people assigned to reviewing national reports.

The second reason is that much attention, time and financial resources are being devoted to the political and peace-keeping side of the secretariat's activities, leaving the social and economic side of the house with diminished operating resources, and weak and ill-defined programme goals. The new CSD and the Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable development must be given higher priority.

NGOS COME TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE

One of the real turning points represented by the two-year UNCED process was NGO participation in the international conference negotiating process. Previously participation had been limited to government delegations, United Nations staff and a small number of NGOs with 'consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, (ECOSOC).' Now a wide number of national, local and NGO representatives with very specific expertise are allowed in.

But have NGOs made a substantial contribution to the CSD working group? According to CSD staff and many government delegations, the answer is no. Now that the door is wide open to the NGOs few have walked in.

There are some practical reasons why NGOs have not been quick to provide substance. First, governments and the CSD have not always given clear guidelines for the format that NGO documentation into the post-UNCED process should take. Many NGOs, particularly outside the United Nations headquarter cities of Geneva and New York, claim they remain completely outside the information loop. Many who have obtained the necessary information, have done so too late to meet CSD deadlines.

The question is: can the NGOs that know the CSD process get past their own narrow institutional interests to actually promote the work of their locally based colleagues of substance? Or is it too much to expect? In the short term, it is perhaps the national NGO networks and forums – such as the Brazilian Forum, the Citizens Network for Sustainable Development in the US, the UNCED/UK Committee in Britain, and the Public Campaign of Environment and Development in Sri Lanka – that will best be able to accomplish these tasks. If not, it will just represent another failure of the Earth Summit• **MMcC**

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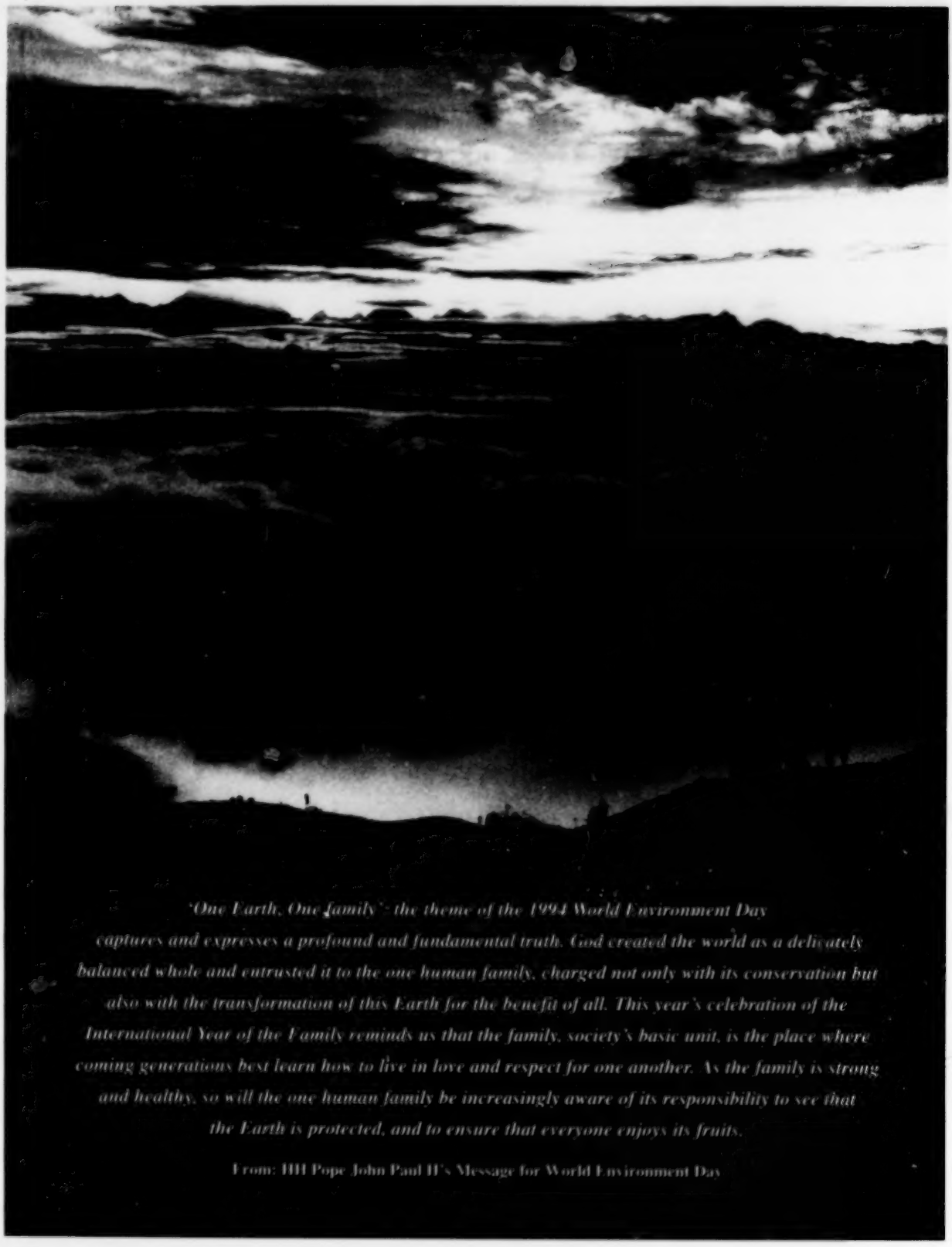


Georgina Ravenscroft/UNEP-Select

'One Earth, One family' - the theme of the 1994 World Environment Day captures and expresses a profound and fundamental truth. God created the world as a delicately balanced whole and entrusted it to the one human family, charged not only with its conservation but also with the transformation of this Earth for the benefit of all. This year's celebration of the International Year of the Family reminds us that the family, society's basic unit, is the place where coming generations best learn how to live in love and respect for one another. As the family is strong and healthy, so will the one human family be increasingly aware of its responsibility to see that the Earth is protected, and to ensure that everyone enjoys its fruits.

From: HH Pope John Paul II's Message for World Environment Day

A THEOLOGICAL/ETHICAL RESPONSE TO AGENDA 21

PROFESSOR SALLIE McFAGUE
Professor of Theology, Vanderbilt Divinity School, USA;
Visiting Professor, Harvard Divinity School, USA

Underlying Agenda 21 is the assumption that humanity has reached a 'defining moment in its history' and that we can address that moment only if we act together 'in global partnership for sustainable development'. This means that we have a common task – a planetary agenda – which is to ensure the well-being of our planet and all its life forms. The World Council of Churches says we must strive for 'peace, justice, and the integrity of creation'. At this defining moment in history we have come to the realization that everything on our planet is interrelated and interdependent and, therefore, the well-being of the parts depends on the well-being of the whole and vice versa.

As this realization sinks in, each of us asks, 'What can I do? How can I contribute to the planetary agenda?' There are many tasks at many levels, from recycling and car-pooling to making automobiles that do not contribute to global warming.

There are also tasks for theologians and ethicists. One such task is to help people think differently about the Earth, especially those people who belong to religious traditions that have neglected or dominated the Earth. Ethicists, philosophers and theologians must ask what are the metaphors and models that control the way we think about the Earth:

- **Is Earth merely an 'hotel' or is it our 'home'?**

- **Is it a place where we use its resources, then move to another spot for further exploitation? Or is it a place that we cherish and need to protect?**

- **Is the Earth, as Thomas Berry asked, merely a resource or retreat (something to use, enjoy or escape to), or is it our 'relative', the mother and father of us all?**

- **Is the Earth a 'machine', a dead object with parts that we can remove and use, or it is a living 'body' with billions of different living organisms, all interrelated and dependent on common factors such as air, water and soil?**

It is vital to determine which models to use because how we think about the Earth will influence our actions.

We are slowly but surely realizing that the model of the Earth as a body may be closer to reality than the model of the Earth as a machine. For several hundred years Western culture has thought about and acted toward the Earth on the basis of the mechanistic model. We now see how catastrophic that model can be. It is time to work with a different model, one that will help humanity feel that Earth is our home, not a hotel, and act accordingly.

The model of the body will help us to see the Earth as our home in three special ways. First, it brings together justice and ecological issues. Often, concern with poor and oppressed human beings is seen to be in competition with the well-being of the environment. But the model of the body unites them, for it focuses attention on needy bodies of all kinds. It tells us that the basics of existence are necessary for all life forms, human and non-human. It helps us to see that nature is the 'new poor' or the 'also poor'. In the same way that poor people have been denied the essentials of existence because of the selfishness of some people who have too much, so also nature has been denied what it needs to survive. From the perspective of the body, 'ecological sin' is refusing to share

> ***'According to Baha'i writings, the principle of the oneness of humanity "....calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race...it repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity." Recognition of this principle requires the abandonment of prejudice....only through the abandonment of prejudice will people be able to work together to form the true global partnership for sustainable development.'***
>
> **From:**
> ***Implementation of Agenda 21 – A Baha'i Perspective*, Peter Adriance***

F·O·C·U·S

EDITED BY JOE KIRWIN

with needy others – both other needy human beings and the needy natural world. Hence, justice to bodies of all sorts unites oppressed people and oppressed nature against those who are excessive in their greed.

Second, the model of the body helps us to see the importance of space in our common home. Western religions have usually focused on time and history, not on place and space – on the acts of God in history towards some future fulfilment rather than on the good life now for all creatures. But from the perspective of the body, place and space are very important. Each and every body needs space for its most essential needs and often specific places or habitats in order to live well and raise its young. The Earth has plenty of time (at least the 5 billion years of our sun's life), but space has become a critical issue. The human population is careering out of control, occupying all the space and by so doing, eliminating the special places needed by other life forms. The view from the body forces us to consider the limits of our planet in terms of energy and space to sustain all its bodies.

> ***'Selfishness and lack of compassion are the root causes of every form of violence, and such irrationality is responsible for the degeneration of the inner ecosystem, which smothers the outer environment and its ecological balance.'***
>
> **A Buddhist view from:** ***Preservation of the Inner Environment,*** **Professor Samdhong Rinpoche***

> ***'Because the one God is also the Creator of the world and its inhabitants, our reflection of God's image is best embodied in acts of justice toward our fellow human beings and acts of guardianship toward all of God's creatures. Ultimately, the oneness of God accounts for the unity of all moral claims. Small wonder, then, that Agenda 21, while specifically addressing the question of humanity's relationship to the ecosphere must, of necessity, speak also of the gap between the income of developing and developed nations, of the need to equalize the status of men and women, of the danger involved in the rapid rise in human population, the need to revise consumption patterns, and the need to assert the unity of the human family.'***
>
> **From:** ***On that Day, God's Name Shall be One: Jewish Ethics and Agenda 21,*** **Bradley Shavit Artson***

Finally, the model of the body suggests that we human beings are special parts of the body of the Earth: we are the self-conscious part that can both wonder at and be responsible for the others with whom we share our home. Although we are on a continuum with all other life forms, we are also different and our differences give us a special role to play in the destiny of our planet. We are the ones who can wonder at the beauty and the vulnerability of other forms of life on Earth. We are the ones who alone know the story of the universe, a history that unites everything in it – and especially on our planet – in complex webs of interrelation and interdependence.

The question is now this: will we accept our calling and care for the sick and deteriorating body of the Earth and the billions of bodies that constitute it? Will we take care of the needy bodies, human and non-human, in our common home, the Earth? If we learn to live in and think about our Earth as a body (and not a machine), a body like other bodies that we love and care for, our answer may be 'Yes'. The 'yeses' of millions of us could make a difference – all the difference.

Based on an article by Professor McFague, published in the UNEP publication Ethics and Agenda 21.

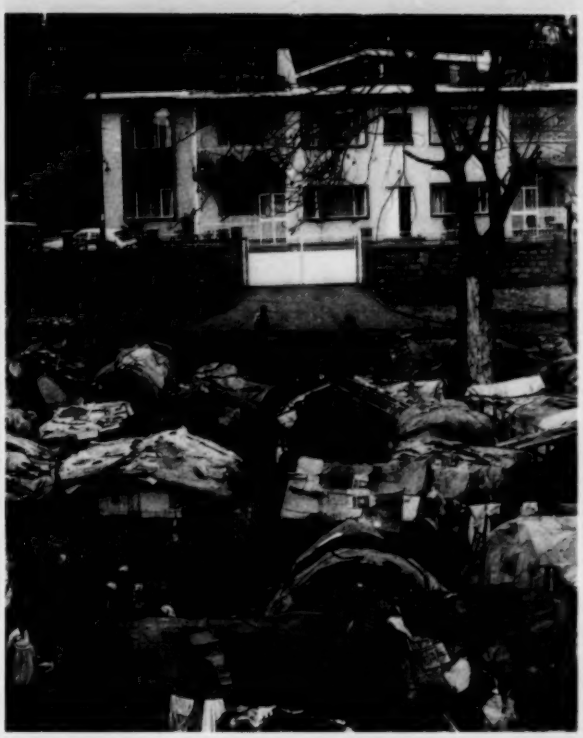
> ***'Injunctions in the Qu'ran and in Prophet Mohammad's*** **Hadiths** ***emphasize again and again the brilliance of God's creation and the responsibilities of human beings to preserve what God has created. This responsibility is more than a legal obligation. Recently governments have legislated measures for the protection of the environment. But the ethical responsibility under Islam is based on a Heavenly Commandment, demanding a greater commitment.'***
>
> **From:** ***Islamic Ethics and Environment,***
> **Mohammad T. Mehdi***

**Taken from the UNEP publication* Ethics and Agenda 21

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

NAIROBI

MOUSSA AWUONDA



Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

Joseph Mukinda and his wife live with their six children in a suburb of north Nairobi called Milimani, which means 'hills' in Swahili. Thirty years of independence has seen the emergence of a middle class among the indigenous Kenyans and today many residents of Milimani are from the educated, middle-income groups like the Mukindas.

The family rents a three-bedroom apartment in a block of flats in a compound protected by fences and security guards. The household enjoys amenities Kenyans associate with good living, such as an air conditioner, electric and gas cooker, refrigerator, washing machine, colour television set and video. With the combined incomes of Mr Mukinda and his wife, Ellah Munibe, the family can afford to drive two cars.

Of course, the Mukindas' and their neighbours' standard of living exceeds by far the level of more than half of the two million people resident in Nairobi, who live, according to recent studies, below the poverty line.

A 1993 Kenyan Government economic survey showed that more than 60% of the people in Nairobi make less that $50 a month and eke out a living in shanty districts such as the infamous Mathare Valley. Considered one of the largest slums in Africa, Mathare's residents often live without running water, electricity or access to health care or education. Further pinching the living standards of not only Mathare residents but all Kenyans, was an inflation rate of 27.5% in 1993. On top of all that, crime is at record levels.

As is the case in many other parts of the world, the environment and the pursuit of sustainable development has suffered in the face of such difficult economic circumstances.

'In the 1960s our cities in Africa were clean and healthy,' says Awori Achoka, Director of the Kenya Energy and Environment Organization (KENGO), which is the nation's leading non-governmental organization. 'Today it's the opposite. Many urban centres are even more polluted, dirtier and unhealthier than the western cities during the Industrial Revolution.'

As the KENGO chief points out, the gains of the environmental movement in Kenya in the last decade tended to concentrate upon the rural areas where desertification and soil erosion problems were acute.

'With increased industrialization and influx of people into the cities,' he says, 'the attention must now be balanced.'

But that is not so easy.

'When we launched programmes to educate the public under slogans like Garbage Is Money or Lead is Dangerous, the response was appalling,' he says. 'In some cases people actually dropped paper wrappers right underneath the posters! But environmental self-awareness geared toward changing individual lifestyles, will be a gradual experience.'

Thanks to KENGO and other Government and NGO work there is some recycling of paper and glass in Nairobi but the amount is limited. In fact, in recent months even garbage collection has been limited because of budgetary constraints in the Nairobi City Council. Another problem is the lack of technical skills to service new garbage collection trucks donated by the French Government. ▶

For the Mukindas' part in helping the environment in Kenya, energy conservation is now a household practice.

Ellah Munibe, who works as an executive at a Nairobi hospital, says conservation in the kitchen involves some improvization.

Joseph Mukinda and family

'When we make hard foods like Githeri – a staple of maize and beans – we use a jiko (charcoal stove). This is done mostly during weekends.'

Rarely does the family use the washing machine, she says, preferring to do most of their washing manually to save fuel. Also, water is short in Nairobi and the family restricts the amount of water allowed in the tub.

Although environmental consciousness is not always apparent in Kenyan society, Mr Mukinda emphasizes that his concerns for the environment trace back much further than the trends of the past decade.

'As a boy tending the family goats, I remember elders telling us horror stories of what would happen if the animals strayed into the cluster of foliage in the fallow land,' he recalled. 'Also at the age of six I remember planting a plum tree, which was part of our tribal ritual to maintain an ecological balance in our lives.'

And Mr Mukinda points out that this consciousness is needed not only among all Kenyans but all Africans and others, if environmental disasters are to be avoided•

NEW YORK

MARY PAT DUNLEAVY

The clear blue plastic bags containing cans, bottles and other refuse lined the curb on a Manhattan street. They were placed there in anticipation of a recycling day pick-up that never came.

For the Therriault family, who bag those recyclables each week for three apartment buildings on their block here in the East Village, it was a typical what-can-you-do? moment. In the year since New York began requiring residents to separate garbage for recycling, the Therriaults say they have encountered a myriad of problems with the system. Between uncooperative tenants and a reluctant sanitation department, they say that the success of recycling rests with those who are willing to do the work.

Like many Americans, Mike (who is of French-Canadian extraction) and Susan (who is Cuban-American) and their seven children are doing their best to comply with the haphazard demands of environmental laws being enacted at the federal, state and local levels in the United States. Many of those laws are the result of dwindling landfills and other side effects of the throw-away American society.

In New York most garbage was either incinerated or deposited in landfills until the city council passed a mandatory recycling policy in 1989. That law required a steady increase in the amount of residential and commercial waste that is recycled.

But with five boroughs and a population of nearly eight million, the city has been slow to change. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), a prominent advocacy organization, Americans as a whole produce 180 million tonnes of garbage a year. Each day New Yorkers contribute about 12,000 tonnes of that, most of which is sent to the Fresh Kills landfill on nearby Staten Island. 'About 5% is incinerated and about 10% is actually recycled,' according to Mark Izeman, one of the NRDC lawyers active in bringing New York City to court for not complying with its own recycling rules.

Adam L. Penenberg

TOP: Susan,15 (left); Mikey, 8 (centre); and Michelle,11 (right) haul newspapers for recycling from one of the buildings from which they collect refuse.

BOTTOM: Michelle, holding a ball of twine aloft, stands with Mikey and his ever-ready cart.

'At least, it's diverted towards recycling,' Izeman says. 'Not all the materials end up getting recycled.'

POLLUTION CONCERN

One reason for the court case against the city is the concern about pollution from incinerators, reluctance from out-of-state landfills to take New York garbage and the exponential growth of Fresh Kills. Now the largest landfill in the world, people are wondering what to do with it. Proposals have ranged from making it a park to turning it into a ski area. But most efforts are focused on reducing the amount of garbage by recycling 25% of the city's waste stream.

The Therriaults live in a small, six storey building typical of lower Manhattan. As superintendents, the family not only helps maintain three buildings on a daily basis – and their own rather hectic household – but when Thursday approaches, everyone does his or her part in helping the city recycle.

After school on Wednesdays, Mike Jr, 8, and his older sisters Susan, 15, Michelle, 11, and Jamie, 10, help out with the recycling tasks. But it is a chore they don't always relish – because of many tenants who disregard the separation regulations. In fact, city government officials estimate that for every 100 tonnes of garbage collected, only 15 tonnes are recyclable, which is far short of the one-third sanitation officials estimate New Yorkers could be recycling.

VIOLATION OF LAWS

The New York City Council passed recycling laws in 1989 that the city has been struggling to obey. But a state court recently ruled that the city had violated these laws by not keeping to the recycling schedule they mandated. By April, the city should have been collecting 4,250 tonnes of recyclables a day instead of 2,526 – or 15% of the city's total waste.

By contrast, the Therriaults estimate that in their own home they recycle between a half and a third of the materials they use.

Like many Americans, they use a lot. In fact the European Union survey indicated that the average American generates 717 kilograms of garbage per person annually, while the Japanese average 475 a year and Europeans 360 kilograms a year.

Meanwhile, the recycling skills that the Therriault children have developed are going to come in handy in another neighbourhood. Mike and Susan, eager to return to a rural lifestyle, have bought a house in Pennsylvania – in a town where there's no recycling policy. But for 50 cents a kilo, the Therriault family can collect cans from their neighbours and sell them to an aluminium processing centre.

'It's a money-losing proposition for us,' says Mike, who will take turns with Susan driving the gang back and forth, 'but it will give the kids something to do'•

THE GLOBAL 500

MARTIN HOLDGATE
President, Global 500 Forum

Several people claim to have invented the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global 500 Roll of Honour for Environmental Achievement. Whoever did, it was an inspired idea. The selection criteria are broad – but the emphasis is on genuine achievement. Recipients are supposed either to have solved a specific environmental problem, or advanced the cause of the environment, or brought significant environmental issues to public notice, or mobilized local and national action for the solution of problems, or contributed significantly to intellectual scientific or theoretical approaches to environmental concerns – or a mixture of all of them! The Selection Committee has almost limitless discretion – so long as they pick people who have really done something for the world environment.

UNEP does not see the Award just as a laurel wreath on the victor's brow, but as a challenge to new endeavours. Recipients are expected to go on promoting 'sound environmental management for sustainable development' and to become 'members of the growing global network of allies helping UNEP in its responsibilities for the care of our planet'.

Most of those words come from the selection criteria. The vision behind them is clear and challenging. And the criteria have succeeded in bringing on to the Roll of Honour an extraordinarily diverse list of people and organizations, with an immense range of experience and skill. The 500 Laureates, when the target tally was reached in 1993, came from over 100 countries.

Statesmen, scholars, diplomats, radicals, grassroots activists, companies seeking to develop and apply 'green technology', journalists, industrialists, farmers, welfare movement leaders, champions of indigenous peoples and of underprivileged women – they are all on the list, alongside representatives from many other fields of action. And there is a new initiative, launched in 1993, to create an award for youth, recognizing that more and more young people, impatient with the inaction of their elders, are working to safeguard the environment they will inherit.

In creating the Award, UNEP urged the Global 500 Laureates to become members of a growing network, pooling their skills, talents and individualities. The Global 500 Forum was created during the 1992 Earth Summit in response. The Forum aims not to create another bureaucracy, debating club or source of resolutions but to establish a flexible alliance in which a member can set out a problem, and get help from others who have solved it.

It is only by the action of individuals with commitment, energy and vigour, that we have any hope of succeeding. Linking them in a global network provides inspiration to all.

And it must not stop there. For every person who is on the Global 500 Roll of Honour, there are thousands around the world doing work of comparable value. They need to be recognized in their own communities, and linked into a world information system that will place at their disposal the kind of knowledge and example the Forum provides.

On World Environment Day, this June, Laureates will meet in London for a crucial discussion on how they can be better supported, and in turn be enabled to give more to the world community through UNEP and through the many organizations of which they are part. To succeed, the Forum will need money (who does not?). We must discuss how to obtain funding to make the basic information system which links the Global 500 Laureates independent of UNEP's scarce resources. This would pay off by animating and sustaining a unique army of energetic volunteers who can and should be used much more effectively for the sake of the planet●